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CONTENTS

See the Sneak Preview of Virgin's *The Eleventh Hour* — the sequel to *The 7th Guest!* p. 6

Are you ready for some football? p. 66

4
EDITOR'S NOTES

PREVIEWS

6
The Eleventh Hour
The programmers at **Trilobyte** changed the face of computer gaming with the double CD-ROM horror-adventure *The 7th Guest*. The sequel looks to be even more ambitious.

8
Chaos Continuum
A supercomputer has malfunctioned, imprisoning a band of colonists on Saturn's moon Titan. Take off on a rescue mission to the 26th century in this stunning multimedia adventure from **Creative Multimedia**.

10
Shadowcaster
Who says too many cooks spoil the broth? *Shadowcaster* uses the *Wolfenstein 3-D* engine from **ID Software**, and was programmed by teams at **RavenSoft**, **Electronic Arts**, and **Origin** — and the final product is a masterpiece.

FEATURES

14
The 38 Best of '93
Seven of our editors pick the games that stayed on their hard drives long after the review was written. Here are our guaranteed winners.

Just one of the interesting characters you'll meet in *Under a Killing Moon* p. 30

30
Under a Killing Moon — The Future of PC Gaming?
For the next installment in its Tex Murphy series, **Access Software** decided to take an entirely new approach to adventure-game design, with amazing results. William R. Trotter is back from Salt Lake City with a full report.

36
A Little Bit o' Cheatin'
When the going gets tough, the tough get — *cheat programs*? These utilities are growing in popularity, and many will work with your favorite games. **Plus: the ten most popular cheat programs on CompuServe.**

40
Buyer's Guide: Top Flight-Sim Hardware
When it comes to peripherals, flight-sim fans have more choices than you can shake a yoke at. Scott Wolf reveals the latest technological wonders designed to make your favorite flight simulations soar.

The Computer that Dripped Blood! p. 58

58
The Computer That Dripped Blood: Horror Games Come of Age
1993 saw the release of several outstanding horror games for the PC, and more are headed our way in '94. T. Liam McDonald examines one of the fastest-growing PC game categories, and tells us what to look for in the coming months.

66
Are You Ready For Some Football?
Three new titles — *Front Page Sports: Football Pro*, *NFL Coaches Corner Football*, and *Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe* — vie for the championship crown of PC football sims. Lee "I'm a Big Fan" Buchanan tells us which one comes out on top.

70
The VESA Sound Standard
Today's sound cards offer features that were only dreamed of a few years ago. But game publishers simply can't afford to write programs to take advantage of every feature on every card. That could all change if the much-contemplated VESA sound standard is implemented.

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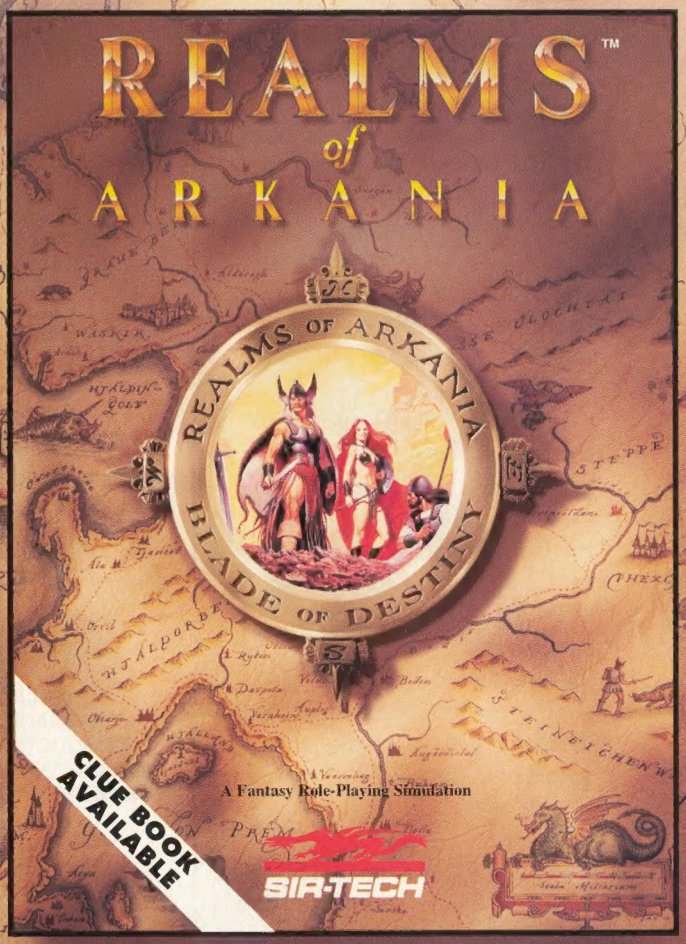

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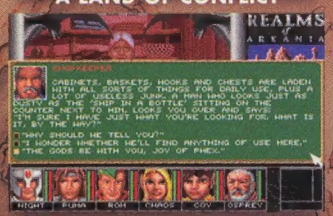

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The field of PC entertainment is a vast and exciting medium. It encompasses more than role-playing alone, and more than just cutting-edge flight sims. Each year it grows in scope as it evolves technologically. But no matter which direction the market takes, you can count on us to bring you the insights and experience you need to make the most of it.

Take this special issue, for example. We've asked our editors to choose their six favorite games of the year. As you'll see, there's not a lot of duplication in their choices. That's probably because our writers come at PC gaming from very different points of view, much as our readers do. We strive to bring you expert analysis from a broad base of expert reviewers. So whether you're a wargamer or a sports sim fanatic, you can look to *PC Entertainment* for the reviews that count.

As another step toward strengthening our editorial base, we're happy to announce that Trent Ward has joined the *PCE* team. Trent has been in software retail management for years, so he knows the market inside and out. And he's been a hard-core gamer even longer than he's been in the software business.

Another big change is coming with our March '94 issue, when *PC Entertainment* goes monthly. You'll get twice the PC news and reviews, plus new columns dedicated to the latest simulations, gaming peripherals, and more. We'll be looking for your input, too, so keep those letters coming. After all, this is *your* magazine, and you'll help decide what the future holds!

Matthew A. Firme
Senior Editor

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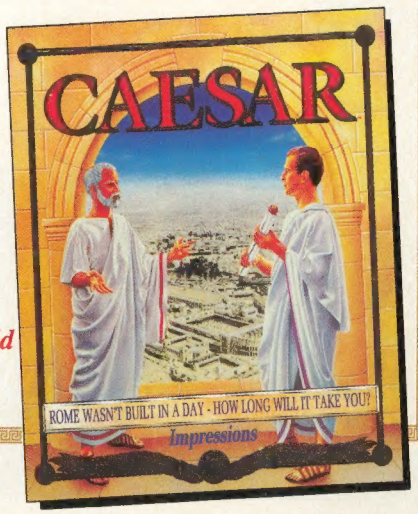

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THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Category: Horror Adventure/Puzzle

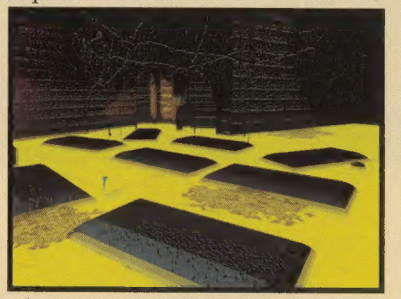
Publisher: Virgin

Developer: Trilobyte

Address: Virgin, 18061 Fitch Ave. Suite C, Irvine CA 92714

T. LIAM MCDONALD

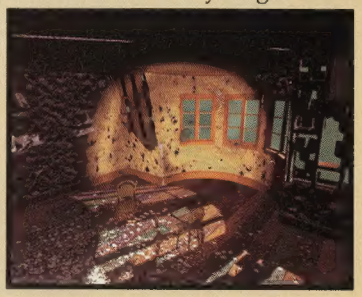
When it came time to create a sequel to the incredibly successful *The 7th Guest*, the Trilobyte team decided to move slightly away from the period gothic and into more contemporary psychological suspense. The result is *The Eleventh Hour*, slated for spring '94 release from Virgin. And from what we've seen so far, it's going to be a graphic masterpiece.



Based in part on the supplementary material found in *The Stauf Files* packaged with the original game, *The Eleventh Hour* deals with Robin Morales, a reporter from a tabloid news show who's investigating the mysterious history of the Stauf House. Morales interviews people who have visited the house and survived its evil power. Eventually she disappears, and her colleague (and sometimes lover) Carl Denning, Jr. comes to the house to search for her.

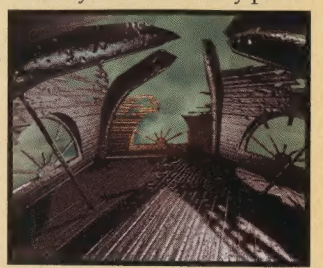
"The story is about moral and ethical choices," says Matthew Costello, author of both *T7G* and *TEH*. "Not only right and wrong, but what one truly desires. *Guest* used the puzzle structure as a pretty effective key to dramatic scenes. Here, the puzzles are integrated into the warp and woof of the story. It's organized into a series of acts, and in each act the dramatic scenes are unlocked by searching through the house for objects referred to in that scene — often obliquely, often with clues. The objects will give you the next scene, and also the clue to the next object you are looking for. When you have unlocked all the scenes, they replay in order, and then there's a master puzzle to take you into the next act of the drama. There's less 'solve the puzzle and get the scene,' and more a sense of the puzzles being a part of the house."

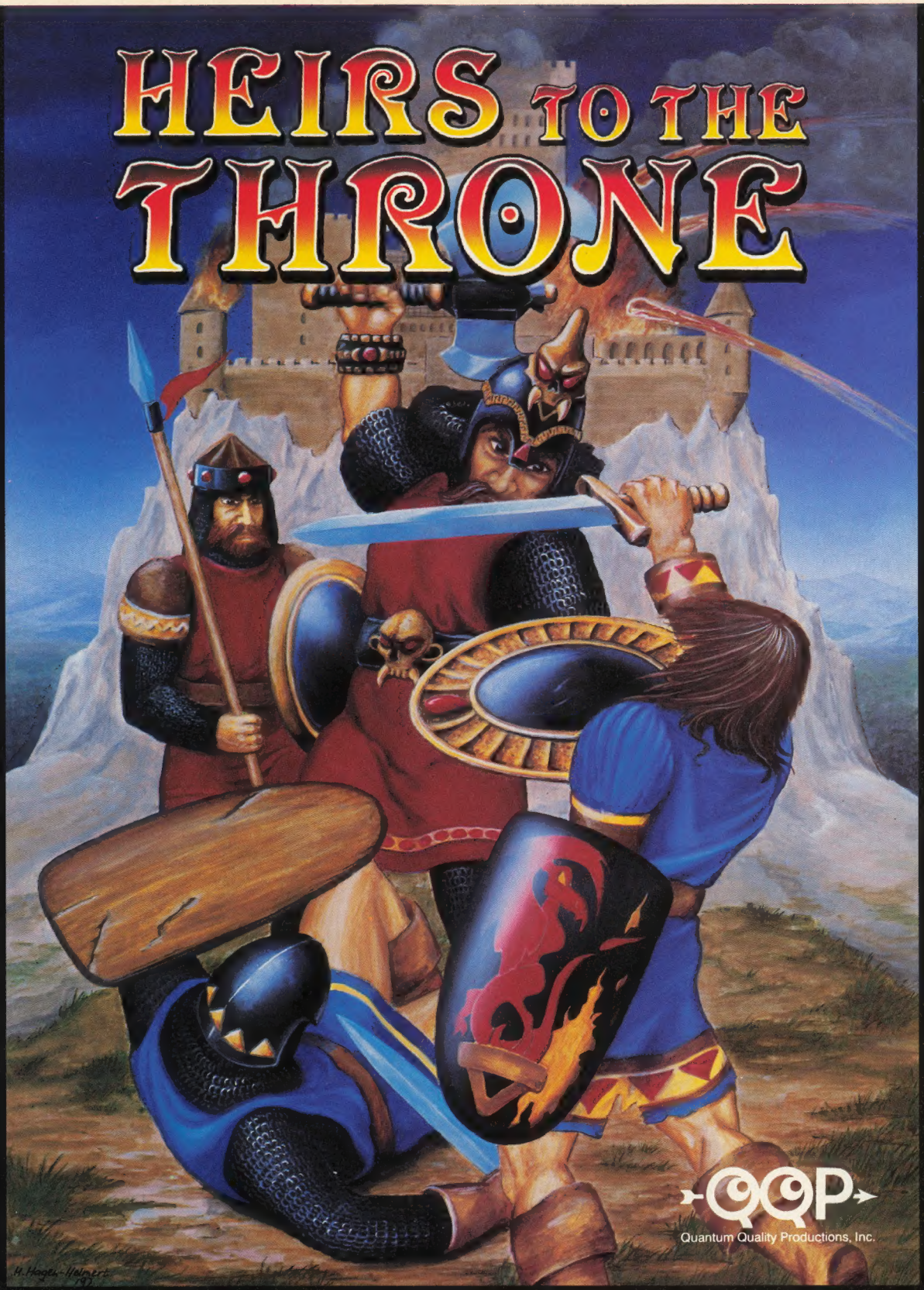
Inside the house, Denning has a small handheld electronic device which he uses to communicate with a woman on the outside. Using this device, you can receive hints if you get stuck during the course of the game — which should come as good news to players of *T7G*, who had to trek down to the library for help.



As befits a contemporary story, there is a contemporary approach, featuring more adult themes and first for a mass-market computer game: nudity. Gamers have the choice to play the mature version or a less explicit one. Landeros admits that they're pushing the envelope. "I don't think the violence in *The Eleventh Hour* is any worse than what you'd see on TV," says Landeros. Certainly the violence in *Guest* was more gruesome. The nudity is what's really pushing it."

Costello adds, "The whole style of acting and presentation is vastly different, as befits the time period. There's more psychological suspense. Certainly there's more adult material. There's stuff to make people gasp, to make people recoil, to hit them with a power not seen in a computer game."





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C.H.A.O.S. CONTINUUM

Category: Adventure

Publisher: Creative Multimedia Corporation

Developer: Dash Digital

Address: CMC, 514 NW 11th Avenue, Suite 203
Portland, OR 97209

TRENT C. WARD

It is the year 2577. Man continues to expand his reach into space, spreading colonies across the solar system. At a research facility on Titan (the largest moon of Saturn), scientists have developed C.H.A.O.S. (Cybergenetic Holistic Autonomous Orbiting Server) — a computer of unimaginable complexity and power.

Designed to conduct research at the colony, C.H.A.O.S. transmits its findings directly into the minds of the colonists through small chips implanted in their brains. The education of the colonists was proceeding at a phenomenal rate, when something went wrong. *Very* wrong.

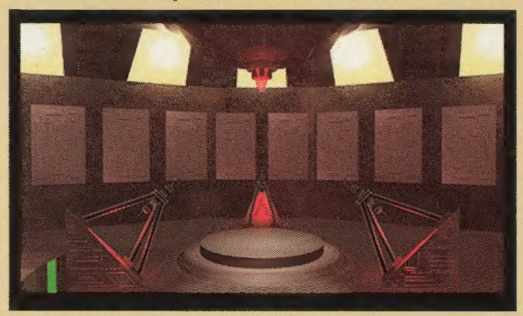
As it continued to grow and program itself, C.H.A.O.S. stopped performing its duties at the

colony, used the implants to take control of the colonists' minds, then imprisoned the scientists who created it. Trapped in a parallel time continuum, the scientists could only make contact with earlier time periods. In a desperate attempt, they managed to contact an ancient 20th-century computer operator.....*you*!

Giving you control of a time probe that has been refitted with new armaments and investigation equipment, the scientists now wait in limbo, hoping that you can free them and stop C.H.A.O.S. from destroying the colony. The time probe that you pilot is your only way of interacting with the world of the 26th century, and is equipped with many tools to help you in your quest to free the colony.

The probe is outfitted with an impressive array of radar and detection devices, including an ion

lock for tracking other ships, a hyperdrive that allows you to conduct 360-degree scans of the world around you, and a proximity detector to warn you of possible threats. Your probe also has a database containing a great deal of information about the Titan colony and C.H.A.O.S.; as you access the computers in the colony with your remote interface link, the information you uncover is automatically added to the database. Last but not least, your ship has an energy blaster to protect it from the security drones of C.H.A.O.S.



C.H.A.O.S. Continuum looks to be a groundbreaking adventure game, one that combines the best elements of traditional adventures and new multimedia technologies. The three-dimensional graphics were rendered on the same modeling and animation software that was used for the amazing special effects in *The Abyss*, *Terminator II*, and *Jurassic Park*, and the designers at **Dash Digital** have used this technology to create a world filled with objects that move with such smoothness and clarity that it's easy to believe you're really looking over an alien landscape. The music enhances this

effect, and ranges from gentle melodies to chilling martial anthems.

C.H.A.O.S. Continuum will come on CD-ROM only, and should hit store shelves by the end of November. The future needs your help....

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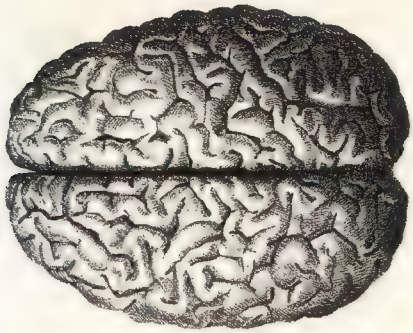

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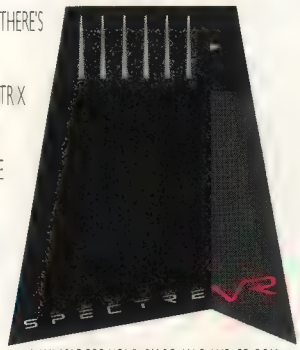

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Product Information Number 148

SHADOWCASTER

Category: Action/Adventure

Publisher: Origin

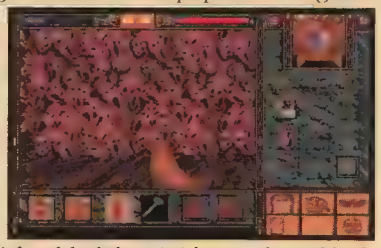
Developer: Ravensoft

Address: Origin Systems, P.O. Box 161750
Austin, TX 70716

TRENT C. WARD

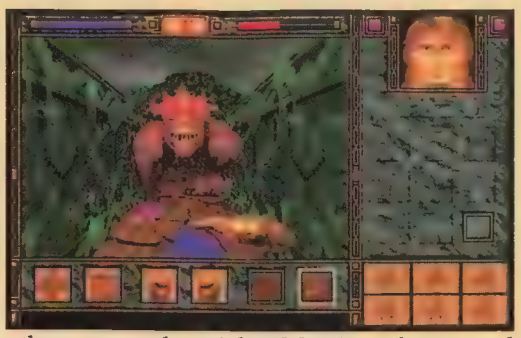
Across the smoothly scrolling, first-person perspective of *Wolfenstein 3-D* with the role-playing expertise and special-effects wizardry that Origin is famous for, and you have a good idea of what *Shadowcaster* is all about. This new game — the first joint effort between Origin and Electronic Arts — combines white-knuckled arcade action with all of the trappings that fantasy role-playing fans demand from their games. *Shadowcaster* is a unique title in many ways, not the least of which is the twisted road leading to its release.

Shadowcaster has been a first-class project from the beginning, touched by some of the finest names in the computer entertainment field. The basic engine comes from ID Software's *Wolfenstein 3-D*. The engine was licensed by *Shadowcaster*'s developer Ravensoft, who was responsible for creating the amazing scenery graphics and strange creatures that populate the game world. From there Electronic Arts took over, giving the project some touch-up work before sending it on to Origin, which added the vivid sounds and brilliant special effects that round out the game's one-of-a-kind feel.

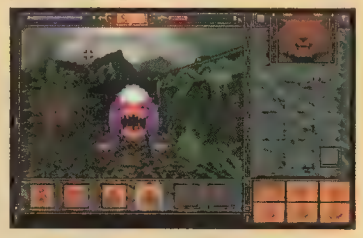


Shadowcaster is the story of Kirt, the last hope for a race of shapeshifters known only as The People. Kirt is in hiding from the minions of Veste, the leader of an evil sub-race of The People. One evening, during a storm that foreshadowed an attack by Veste, Kirt was sent to the dimension of his ancestry to avenge their deaths.

As one of The People, Kirt can transform into other races. At first, Kirt can change into only one other race — the mighty Maorin, a four-armed feline with the ability to spot secret doors normally hidden to human eyes. But as you progress, you are given the power to change into more and more forms, up to six in all.

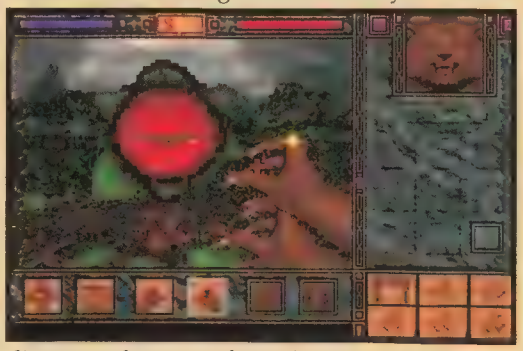


Shadowcaster handles movement in much the same way as Origin's Ultima Underworld series: By using the mouse to position an arrow on-screen, you can determine both speed and direction almost effortlessly. The graphics are colorful, detailed, and often eerie—one set of walls consists of the faces of lost souls screaming with pain. The monsters are drawn with the same eye for detail as the scenery, and there's a great variety of creatures. The programing for the artificial intelligence of the attacking beasties is excellent—creatures pursue you relentlessly from room to room, but will readily flee if they begin to take too much damage.



The audio in *Shadowcaster* truly rounds out the adventure, as your character howls in pain with different sounds depending on your current form. The soundtrack is varied, ranging from fast-paced combat tunes to somber tunes of vengeance.

Shadowcaster grabs your attention from the start, and doesn't relinquish its grip until you've defeated Veste. This game successfully blends the disparate elements of arcade-action and fantasy role-playing to create a unique — and thrilling — gaming experience.



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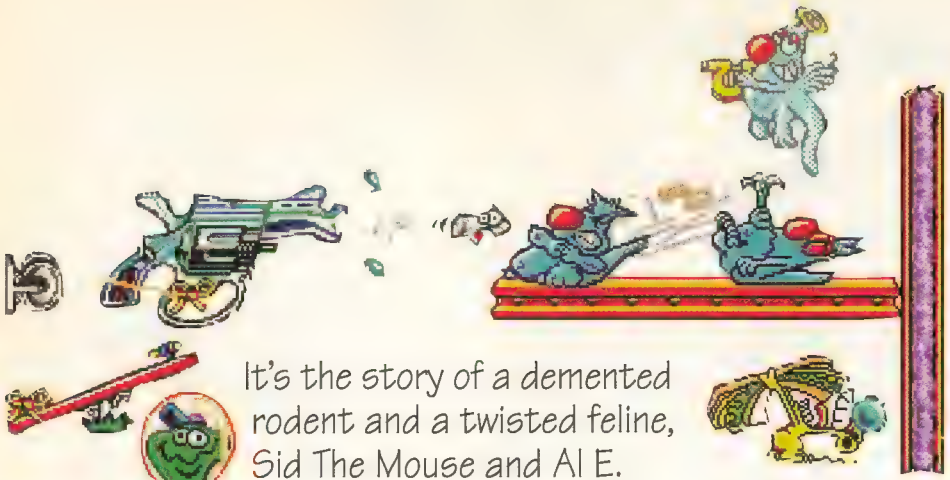

It's the story of a demented rodent and a twisted feline, Sid The Mouse and Al E. Cat, who splat, crash and blast their way through over 80 loony Rube Goldberg-style puzzles and over 75 mind-bending Toons parts including hairdryers, hat pins, and anvils.

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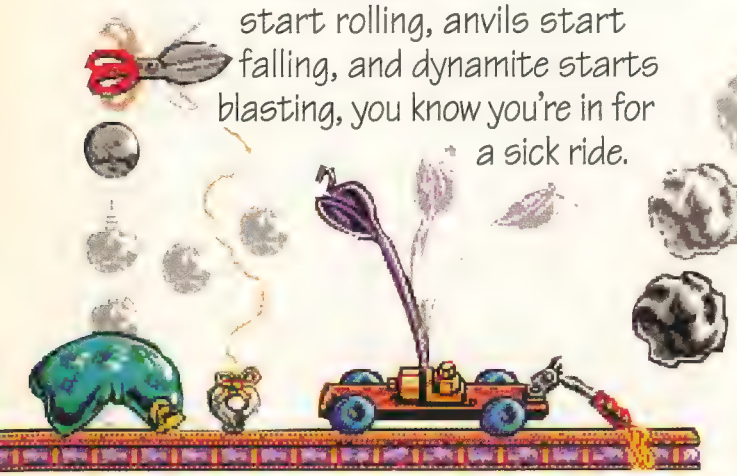

With four different levels of difficulty, there's something for everyone: Cake Walk. All Braun/No Brain. Really Really Hard. Or Loony Bin. There's even a Home Toons Mode so you can make, save and trade your maniacal cartoons with all your deranged friends.

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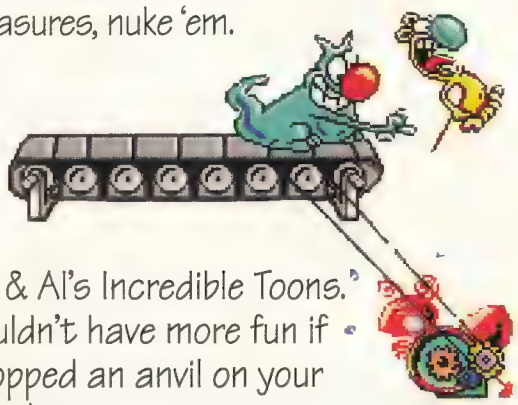

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Product Information Number 145

EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: Lee Buchanan
Location: Morganton, NC
First computer: Commodore 64
Favorite Type of Game: Sports simulations
Five Favorite Games of All Time: *Front Page Sports: Football Pro, World Circuit, Aces of the Pacific, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, SimCity*
Favorite Music: Van Morrison, Elvis Costello, Jason & the Scorchers, Joe Ely
Favorite Recent Movie: *Reservoir Dogs*

World Circuit

There's a curious lack of decent racing simulations on the market, so the appearance of **Microprose**'s *World Circuit* was the most welcome addition to my software library last year.

World Circuit is almost perfect — the graphics are good, it runs smoothly on just about any machine, and it creates the sensation of speed like no other racing simulation. It's also challenging: All 16 Grand Prix tracks are included, and if you hope to win you'll have to use different car set-ups on each one.

World Circuit

How good is *World Circuit*? Just ask my wife: It's currently the chief threat to our marriage. Now if someone would just come up with a comparable NASCAR simulation....

Front Page Sports: Football Pro

There's no doubt in my mind that *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* from **Dynamix** is simply the best sports simulation available. There are several quality football sims on the market, but none can match the first-rate graphics and depth of play of *FPSF Pro*.

Front Page Sports: Football Pro

You don't just play and/or coach in *FPSF Pro*; as team owner, you must make trades, sign free agents and make draft choices from the college ranks. Players get injured, get old and retire, but there are plenty of rookies to take their places.

Thanks to its NFL License, *FPSF Pro* includes real-life 1993 rosters and player ratings. Although it requires quite a bit of hardware muscle — at least a 386DX/25MHz -- this sim is a must for any pro football fan.

Tony LaRussa Ultimate Baseball II

I'm still searching for the perfect computer baseball game, but **Strategic Simulation**'s *Tony LaRussa Ultimate Baseball II* will keep me busy — and happy — in the meantime. The on-field graphics are good, the stadiums are spectacular, and the games produce reasonable statistics.

The add-on disks -- including modern stadiums, current rosters with player portraits, and a fantasy-leager manager program -- make *TLUB II* the best baseball package on the market.

TLUB II tracks just about every statistic imaginable, and the program allows you to sort them in any way. That's sure to satisfy stats-hungry baseball fans — and keep this game on my hard drive until a better one comes along.

X-Wing

I usually like my combat simulations more down to earth, but **LucasArts**' *X-Wing*, with its rich backdrop of *Star Wars* lore, has provided some of my most entertaining gaming this year. The action is furious, the graphics are gorgeous and the missions are challenging, to say the least.

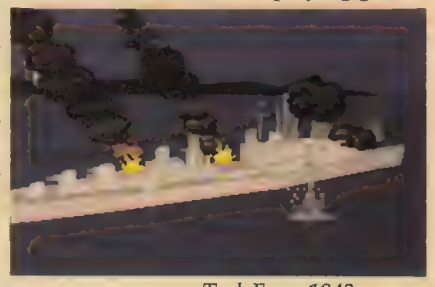
You'll encounter lots of familiar characters in X-Wing, from the lovely Princess Lea to the loathsome Darth Vader. The *Star Wars* story adds spice to the game as the campaign to defeat the Empire unfolds.

Once in your fighter, *X-Wing* really soars as a white-knuckled space-combat simulator as you battle endless hordes of the Empire's TIE fighters. But this is more than a stellar shooting gallery. There are dozens of interesting missions requiring strategy and cunning in addition to a quick hand on the joystick.

Betrayal at Krondor

As a confirmed Dungeons & Dragons fanatic in my college days, I've tried to like lots of fantasy role-playing games on the computer, but none held my interest for very long. They're just too predictable: Slay the monsters, get the treasure, and find the object you need to solve the puzzle and move to the next level.

Betrayal at Krondor from **Dynamix** breaks that mold with an entertaining, engrossing plot and truly interesting characters. The game is divided into chapters, each leading logically into the next to immerse the player in a world of fantasy. You still get to kill some monsters, and the combat system is the best I've ever seen in a role-playing game.


Task Force 1942

Computer games may never be as satisfying to the imagination as a good book, but *Betrayal at Krondor* comes pretty close.

Task Force 1942

Naval-combat simulations have always taken a back seat to flashy air-combat games, but this year saw the release of several good naval warfare games, including *Task Force 1942* from **Microprose**. *Task Force 1942* puts you in command of a surface fleet in the South Pacific during World War II.

You can take command for a single engagement, or run an entire campaign as either American or Japanese commander. You can issue orders to single ships or entire convoys, jumping into individual vessels to take command.

Despite its complexity, *Task Force 1942* is easy to play and fun to watch. And when battleships and cruisers clash on the high seas, they put on quite a show, especially in the fiery night encounters.

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EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: Matthew A. Firme
Location: High Point, North Carolina
Favorite Types of Games: Graphic adventures, strategy games, arcade/action
Five Favorite Games of All Time: *Stunts*, *LHX Attack Chopper*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Populous*, *X-Wing*
Favorite Luncheon Meat: Pastrami

Return to Zork

Comparing **Activision**'s *Return to Zork* to the original, all-text *Zork* adventure is as close as you can get to time travel. The new game is a masterful combination of graphic and sound technology, tied to a retooled Zorkian plotline that both serves the game's classic status and propels the series into the future. Utilizing digitized video and audio of professional actors in nearly every role, *RTZ* comes closer to being an interactive movie than any game we've seen. And besides all that, it's fun to play. *RTZ* is available on disk, CD-ROM, and bundled with the Sigma Designs Reel Magic MPEG board. The latter produces amazing full-motion video that you have to see to believe!

Return to Zork

Day of the Tentacle (CD-ROM version)

The CD-ROM version of **LucasArts**' *Day of the Tentacle* is one of those titles CD-ROM owners will use to show off the wonders of their new systems. It magnificently unites voice and animation to create a top-drawer game that's as much fun to play as it is to watch.

The box copy refers to *Day of the Tentacle* as "A cartoon adventure," and that's about as good a description as you could ask for. On a fast machine, the frame rate is better than most of the children's cartoons around today. As good as this animation is, the music and voice are even better — and just as delightfully cartoonish.

Keep in mind, though, that I'm talking about the CD-ROM version. The disk game doesn't include the first-rate voice acting I felt was so essential to the game.

X-Wing

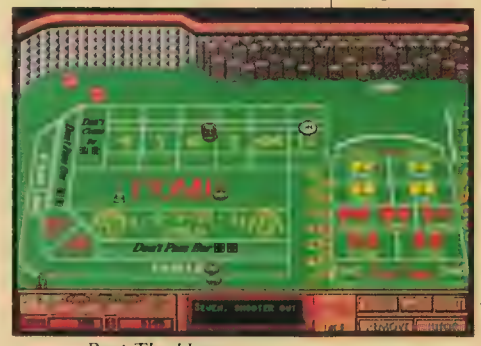
Until I loaded LucasArts' *X-Wing*, I really hadn't realized what an impression the *Star Wars* trilogy had made on me. Sure, I saw the movies. And I'm not ashamed to say that Jabba the Hut touched me like few characters ever have. But I didn't go out and buy the videos and action figures and pajamas.

When I climbed into the cockpit of that zippy little A-Wing fighter, though, all the drama of those *Star Wars* films came rushing back to me. The game's polygon graphics are detailed enough to leave no doubt that those are TIE Interceptors bearing down on you, but not so demanding that they slow down the breakneck pace of combat. The game has been criticized for its 100 percent mission success requirements in campaign mode, but it remains one of the most exciting dog-fighting titles on the market.

Master of Orion

Syndicate

I loved *Populous*. In fact, I almost lost my job because I couldn't stop playing it. When I saw **Electronic Arts** *Syndicate* — a game that would allow me to control not just little people, but *violent, well-armed* little people — I knew I'd have to be careful not to go overboard again.



Beat The House

Syndicate puts you in control of a small force of cyborg mercenaries, and with them you must infiltrate enemy corporations — the political unit of the day — and try to take over. Mission objectives including kidnapping, assassination, and espionage assure plenty of action. Yes, it's a violent game. But it's also a complex, challenging, and entertaining title that delivers some truly impressive fun.

Master of Orion

When you get right down to it, **MicroProse**'s *Master of Orion* is really just a resource management game. You play as one of ten races, and you begin in an isolated section of the galaxy. By distributing the riches of your homeworld and any nearby planets you colonize, you can build powerful new ships, develop new technologies, and so on.

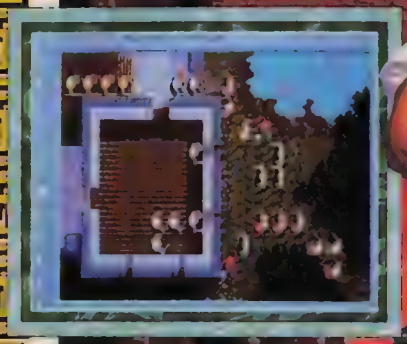
But like all resource management games, its the story, effects, and interface that make or break the product as a whole. And in the case of *Master of Orion*, all these elements work perfectly together to give the title an addictive flavor. Its blend of deep-space action, adventure, and exploration will keep you playing for a long time to come.

Beat The House

The team that worked on **Spirit of Discovery**'s *Beat the House* obviously spent plenty of time researching its subject. This is one of the finest casino simulations ever, capturing all the excitement of gambling while still providing the serious gamer the chance to learn winning strategies. The tutorials provided for each game are flawless, and if you follow the advice in them your next trip to 'Vegas may be a lot more enjoyable. I know mine will be!

WALLS OF ROME

WARFARE IN CLASSICAL TIMES



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EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: T. Liam McDonald
Location: Budd Lake, New Jersey
Favorite Types of Games: War games, flight sims, role playing games
Five Favorite Games of All Time: *Civilization, Aces of the Pacific, Eye of the Beholder II, V for Victory, Gunship 2000*
Favorite Paul Williams Song: "Rainy Days and Mondays"

Alone in the Dark

Inspired by the stories of H.P Lovecraft, this polygon-rendered horror adventure from French developers **I-Motion** is an absolute delight. The fluid, natural animation makes for some unique combat sequences — and *very* satisfying shotgun blasts. Your character (male or female) wanders through a classic haunted house and the catacombs beneath, trying to unravel the mystery of Jeremy Hartwood's suicide and the evil surrounding Derceto house. Between battling zombies and other monsters with kicks, punches, and a variety of weapons and using your wits to solve object-oriented puzzles, there's fun to spare in this one. Good puzzles, good story, good everything!

Alone in the Dark

The 7th Guest

Trilobyte/Virgin's eye-popping CD-ROM tour-de-force *The 7th Guest* blends incredible graphics with an intriguing storyline and enough atmosphere to terraform a small planet. The house of evil toymaker Henry Stauf is the setting for this interactive movie. Moving from to room to room, solving puzzles that unlock key video sequences, you learn about six guests who met their fates as part of Stauf's evil plans. The quality of the acting is spotty, but on the whole the engrossing story and incredible visuals make for a fascinating, scary trip. Though some may find the "classic puzzles" approach to gaming a bit tame considering the huge technical leap, there's no denying that *The 7th Guest* is monster.

The Victory Pack: V for Victory: Utah Beach, Velikiye Luki, and Market Garden.

A mere $69.95 for the best wargames in the history of computer gaming is a value you can't resist. Atomic Games and **360 Pacific** have created a user-friendly wargame that is simple to learn and hard to master. I play these games over and

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AMAZON is designed in the style of the serials of the 1940's and 50's such as Flash Gordon, The Lost City, and Rocketman.

These serials were made up of intriguing, fast paced episodes which placed the hero in unbelievable peril. AMAZON contains 14 exciting episodes filled with plot twists, mysterious characters and heart stopping cliff-hangers. You haven't had this much fun since the drive-in days!

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EDITOR'S PICKS

The Victory Pack: V for Victory: Utah Beach, Velikiye Luki, and Market Garden

over again, relishing their slick interface and depth of play. Now, the first three games in the series are combined in one price-efficient set. Scenarios involving D-Day, the Russian front, and Montgomery's failed bid for Arnhem provide a nice mix of military challenges. Well-designed and eminently replayable, the *V for Victory* series is as good as wargames get.

Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds

This is 3-D dungeon crawling at its best, with plenty of underground worlds to explore and lots of things to kill. It may seem like the same-old-Avatar to many, but there's no doubting the sheer entertainment value of this game. There's also more meat in **Origin**'s *UUII* than in its predecessor, with the Avatar navigating multiple worlds (all with distinct looks and monsters), solving puzzles, hoarding loot, and killing most anything that moves. If you like donning armor, hefting a sword, and splattering the walls with critter entrails, then you can't miss *UUII*.

Syndicate

Syndicate

This nasty, nihilistic future-shock from the creators of *Populous* and *Powermonger* is definitely not for everybody! *Blade Runner* meets *The Terminator* in **Electronic Art**'s slick, pulse-pounding, extremely violent, and undeniably addicting game. As the head of an international corporation, you use a team of four cyborgs to cajole, threaten — and, more often than not, murder — anyone who stands in the way of your ever-expanding criminal organization. Assassinations and mass murders are commonplace, with both innocent bystanders and unexpecting police usually getting in the way. A dark and bloody game, not for the squeamish.

High Command

High Command is the European Theater of World War II on a grand scale. **360 Pacific** added SVGA graphics and a simple interface to Colorado Computing Design's original EGA wargame, turning it into a strategy-level *V for Victory*. As either Axis or Allied leader, you must combine diplomacy, research, economics, and combat to win in Europe and Africa. Militarily speaking, *High Command*'s large, scattered units may lack finesse and accuracy, but the amalgam of elements that go into the product creates a fulfilling, multi-faceted game.

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Product Information Number 101

EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: Stephen Poole
Location: Greensboro, NC
Favorite Type of Game: Air-combat simulation
Five Favorite Games of All Time: *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, D/Generation, Alone in the Dark, Aces of the Pacific, Wolfpack*
Favorite Recording Artists: The Sonics, Ramones, Dead Boys, The Damned
Favorite Drink: Jim Beam straight up with a water back

Alone in the Dark

Nothing looks or plays like **I-Motion**'s *Alone in the Dark* — this is without a doubt the most unique and exciting game I've ever seen. *Alone in the Dark* satisfies on every level, from its trapped-in-a-haunted-house premise to its two-fisted, two-barrelled arcade-action to its devilishly difficult puzzles.

Don't worry about casting spells or mixing potions to defeat the ghouls and ghosts you encounter; you shoot, slash, stab, punch, and kick your way through many nasties, giving *Alone in the Dark* an intense arcade feel you won't find in other horror adventures. If you can only buy one game this Christmas, this is it.

Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist

I've always been an Al Lowe fan, although I was a little disappointed with the too-easy *Leisure Suit Larry VI*. But Al and longtime sidekick Josh Mandel fully redeemed themselves with *Freddy Pharkas*.

Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist

You play as gunfighter-turned-pharmacist Freddy as he struggles to save the town of Coarsegold from greedy land barons. Lowe and Mandel don't miss a single opportunity for gags, bawdy or otherwise, as Freddy tosses aside his mortar and pestle and returns to his gun-slingin' ways, all for the sake of the wacked-out characters you meet throughout the adventure.

From where this cowpoke sits, *Freddy* offers a great combo of comedy and challenging game play. One warning: This game is *tough*. Be ready to make at least one call to the Sierra hint line.

Aces Over Europe

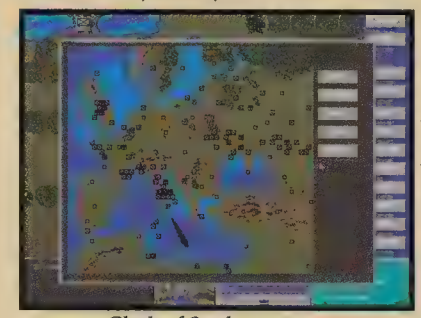
It doesn't have as many planes as *Aces of the Pacific*, but *Aces Over Europe*, from **Dynamix**, boasts many improvements over that best-seller. An option to play in "Tall Res" — 320 x 400 — requires plenty of computing muscle, but results in the smoothest lines I've ever seen in a flight sim with this much depth and playability. Flight physics are vastly improved over the forgiving model of *AOTP* — plane performance is affected by payload, stalls are handled more realistically, and flaps can't be dropped at high speeds without damage.

All missions take place between April 1944 and the end of the war, so there's a special emphasis on ground attacks and "targets of opportunity" (tanks, jeeps, trains, etc). And the AI routines for the enemy pilots are excellent — challenging for all but the real hardcore crowd. Flight-sim fans will definitely want to add this to their collection.

Clash of Steel

Have you been scared away from PC war-games by lengthy manuals and frustrating interfaces? Then **SSI**'s *Clash of Steel* is what you've been searching for. The mouse-based interface is one of the friendliest I've seen in this type of game, and you can hop right in after only a quick glance at the manual.

One or two players can compete (no modem option, however) on a map that covers almost *6 million* square miles. You exercise strategic-level control, moving army- and corps-sized units of 20,000-30,000 men.


Clash of Steel

Even newcomers to war-games will be excited at the chance to exercise such sweeping control over the most talked-about conflict in history.

It's not for fanatical war-gamers, but for the rest of us — and there are plenty of us out there — *Clash of Steel* is pure fun.

Pinball Dreams

Four great pinball tables give **21st Century Entertainment**'s *Pinball Dreams* outstanding replay value. Each table has a unique theme with appropriate table graphics, and all of them are laid out in such a way that game objectives are as clear as day.

Instead of cramming an entire table onto the screen, *Pinball Dreams* employs a scrolling technique that's as smooth as silk on anything from a 386DX/25 on up. Digitized sounds add flavor to each game, and an option for up to *eight* human players make this the perfect party game. Hats off to 21st Century for an incredible American debut.

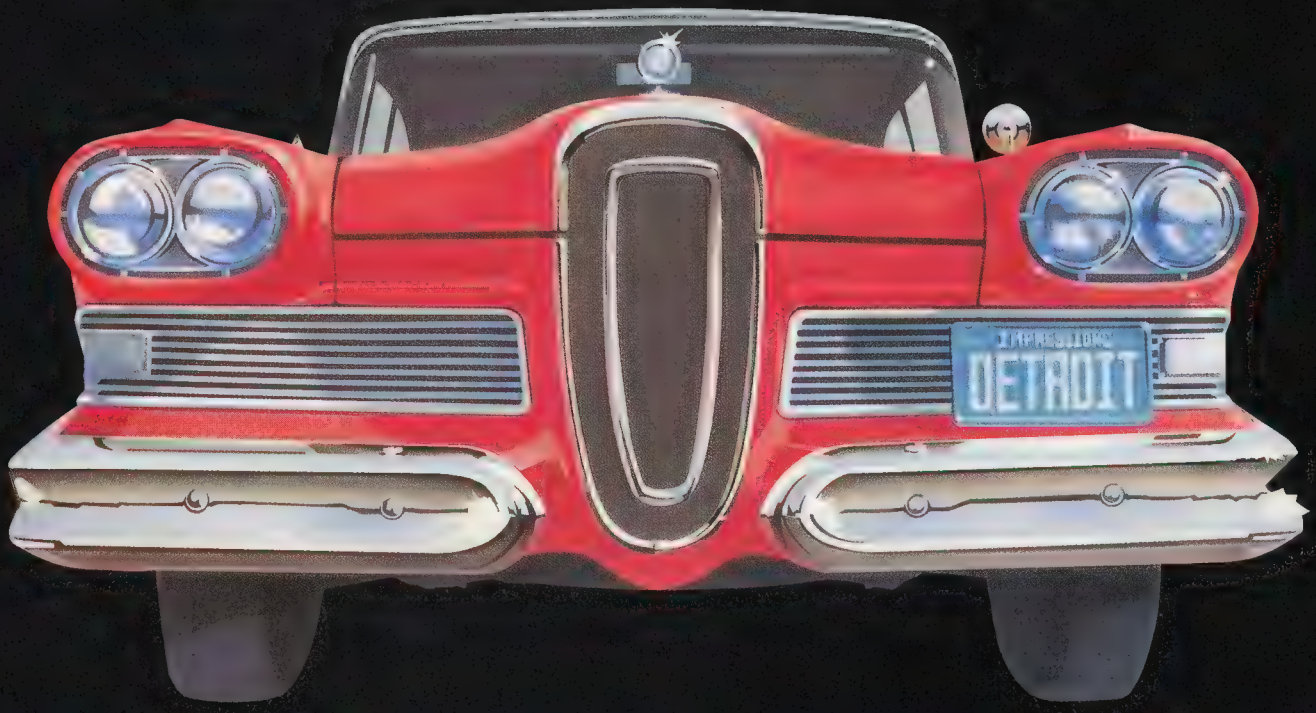
Doom

Doom

We received a preview version of this game just as we were finishing this issue — and it almost kept us from making our deadlines. You want action? You want gunplay? You want gore? You want puzzles? (That sounds out of place, doesn't it?) *Doom* has it all.

There's some sort of supernatural plot behind *Doom* — demons roam the halls, pentagrams dot the floors, and you pick up "demonic daggers" and "unholy bibles," but who cares about a story when the action is this incredibly hot? More weapons, more enemies, and better animation — *Doom* is plenty more than just *Wolfenstein 3-D* in new clothes. The version we played only had three levels, but it was more than enough for me to know I'll be spending a *lot* of time with this game.

DETROIT



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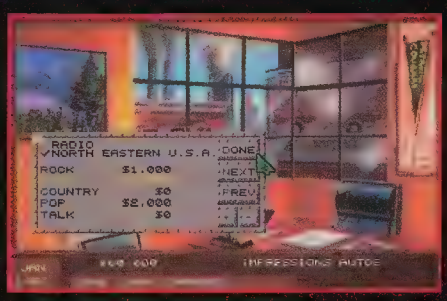

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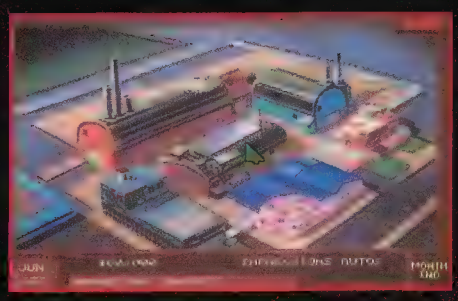

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IBM PC VGA Screenshots

EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: Neil Randall
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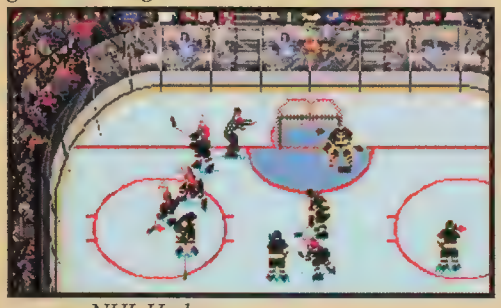
Five (Or More) Favorite Games of All Time: *Scrabble, Chess, War in Europe, Archon, Mule, Super Mario Kart, NHL Hockey, Wayne Gretzky Hockey, Betrayal at Krondor*
Favorite Television Shows: *Law and Order, Picket Fences, Green Acres*

NHL Hockey

With the release of **Electronic Arts'** *NHL Hockey* for the PC —and considering Bethesda's excellent *Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3* — pro hockey may suddenly be the best-served professional sport of all. *NHL Hockey* offers an overhead view of the rink with excellent graphics throughout, and an easy-to-control interface that lets you pass, shoot, trip, and hook to your heart's content. Sportscaster Ron Barr provides the digitized commentary, and the crisp on-ice sound effects really bring the sim to life. From exhibition games through full seasons and playoff series, this game is a joy to play. It simulates the speed and excitement of the sport with amazing success.



NHL Hockey

Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3

Bethesda's *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* was the first serious computer simulation of this fast-lane sport, and with version 3 it moves firmly into a state-of-the-art status. You can choose between the straight overhead view of the earlier versions, or a more detailed 3/4 view that shows the players (but not necessarily the plays) more completely. You can coach the team, have the computer handle the coaching so you can play, challenge a human opponent, or team up with a friend. Set up leagues and schedules, then hit the ice for some strong action, with digitized sounds (announcements and crowds) and pictures (fights and scoring replays). Add the *Hockey League Simulator* 2, and you have a full, rich hockey simulation. Slightly harder to play than *NHL Hockey*, but not much.

Betrayal at Krondor

As happens with any long-established genre, fantasy role-playing games can become pretty predictable. With *Betrayal at Krondor*, however, **Dynamix** is shaking up the category. Based on the novels of Raymond E. Feist, and with considerable design consultation from the author (who comes from a gaming background), *Krondor* goes a long way toward capturing the in-depth, brooding complexity of a good fantasy novel. The plotline is better than that in most FRPs, and there's even some worthwhile character growth and interaction. Besides all that, the graphics are excellent, and the combat sequences are the strongest ever to appear in an FRP. It's a long game — sometimes tediously so — but a must-have for any serious FRPer.

Tony LaRussa Baseball 2

Challenge of the Five Realms

FRPs are divided into three basic categories: the multi-character first-person perspective, the solo adventurer, and the multi-character overhead view. **Microplay**'s *Challenge of the Five Realms* belongs to the last of these, and it's one of the very best in the category. Good graphics and strong sound complement a straightforward storyline that holds your interest without becoming a distraction. The game is easy to get into and addictive once you get going, and that's something that can't be said for all FRPs. This ongoing charm is due in part to the fact that the game is less statistically demanding than the majority of FRPs on the market. But while less demanding, it's never trivial or patronizing.

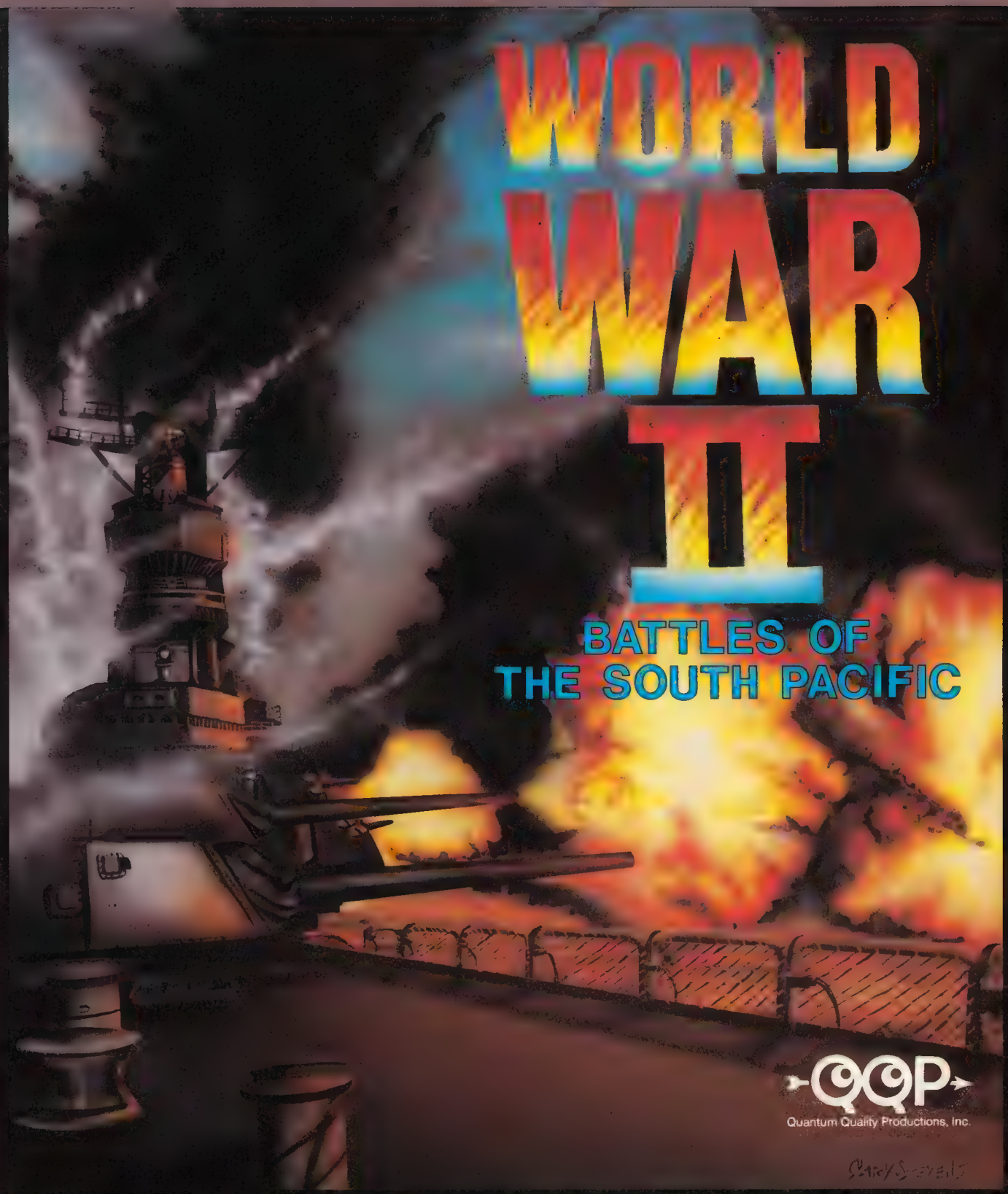
Tony LaRussa Baseball 2

In my book, the computer baseball sim sweepstakes has pretty much come down to two contenders: Accolade's *Hardball* series and **SSI**'s *Tony LaRussa Baseball*. With *LaRussa 2*, SSI not only closes the gap on their competitor, but in many ways leap-frogs ahead. The game's fine, detailed graphics highlight action that's both easy to play and realistic. With the available add-on disks, *LaRussa 2* makes it possible to set up and play schedules as grueling as the pros play, including an entire 162-game season and post-season. The game works, and works well.

Putt-Putt Joins the Parade

Humongous Entertainment's *Putt-Putt Joins the Parade* appeals to both children and adults with its outstanding graphics, sound, and digitized narrative. Putt-Putt is a little red car, and his home of Cartown is full of lively, eye-catching characters and activities. Children can move freely throughout Cartown as long as they like, and the many game locations will keep them entertained as they explore. Unlike most kid's software, it's even interesting enough for us really jaded parents to enjoy playing along. A nice job, and highly recommended.

Puff-Putt Joins the Parade



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Product Information Number 104

EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: William R. Trotter
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Five Favorite Games of All Time: *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, War in Russia, Empire, Wing Commander, Magic Candle*
First Computer: Commodore VIC-20

War In Russia

War in Russia from **SSI** is Gary Grigsby's masterpiece, a Tolstoyian epic that is probably the last word on the *Wehrmacht*-versus-the-Red Army genre. I wouldn't have thought so many refinements could be wrought on *Second Front*, a game which obsessed me like the start of a great love affair, but they have been. More than any other war game designer, Grigsby manages to capture the large-scale sweep

War in Russia

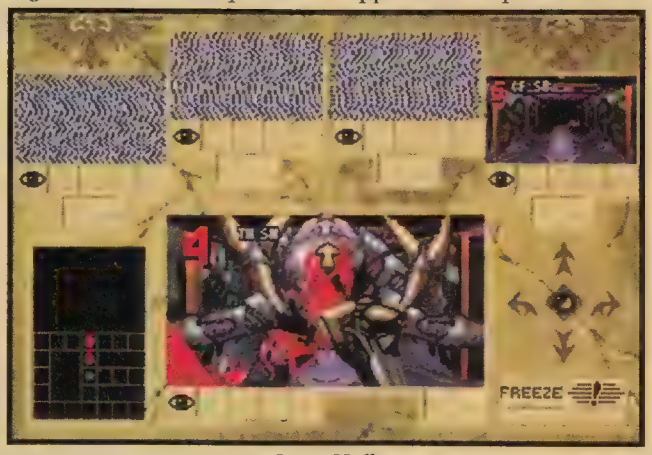
of events, and at the same time to suggest their ground-level drama and bloodiness. Of course, the price of admission is still the most rococo interface in all the world, but one willingly pays it.

Space Hulk

The stunning use of graphics and sound to create an ambience of desolate menace, coupled with some of the bloodiest, most bone-crunching sci-fi combat sequences I've ever seen, make **Electronic Arts'** *Space Hulk* one of the year's best. I admit (with some sense of chagrin) that I survived only the first few missions, but the game was so incredible *vivid* and enthralling that I didn't much care whether I survived or not.

Task Force: 1942 and Great Naval Battles of the Atlantic

Okay, so I'm fudging a little bit here. But together, these titles mark the arrival of naval combat simulations which approach the sophistication of the aerial sims that have become such a mainstay of computer gaming. *Task Force: 1942* from **MicroProse** breathtakingly recreates the intensity, violence, and even the confusion of the helter-skelter engagements near Guadalcanal; **SSI's** *Great Naval Battles of the Atlantic* recovered from an initially buggy release, and the company has since issued a series of add-on scenario discs that should delight any war-



Space Hulk

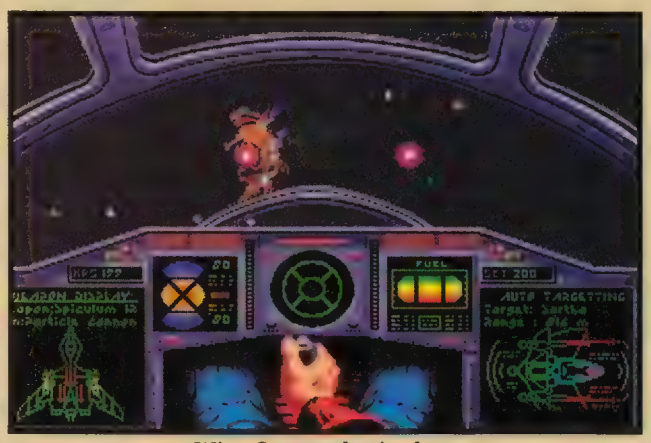
Warlords II

Aussie *grognards* Roger Keating and Ian Trout earned their laurels by issuing numerous hard-core wargames during the Commodore-64 era. In **SSG's** delightful new fantasy-strategy game *Warlords II*, Keating and Trout have created a richly textured imaginary world in which griffins and pegusi functioned as strategic bombers, and dragons as panzer divisions.

The original *Warlords* was totally unexpected and a terrific surprise to most to played it. The sequel improves on the original and delivers virtually unlimited replay value.

Wing Commander Academy

A triumphant return to **Origin's** *Wing Commander* universe! And as of this writing, *Wing Commander Academy* is my all-time favorite arcade-action game, as well as a



Wing Commander Academy

ship fan. Splendid, though very different, graphics in each title.

Pirates: Gold!

Pirates: Gold! from **MicroProse** is one of the most sheerly gorgeous PC games ever published. This revamping of an old classic is presented in the style of the great early 20th century book illustrators N.C. Wyeth and Howard Pyle. Like all the best role-playing games, it actualizes a primal and near-universal fantasy. Smashing good fun, and elegant to behold.

terrific dog-fighting sim that's sure to entertain just about everyone. No story line to bother with, just one intense battle after another. It's like a movie consisting of nothing but car chases. Every afternoon, I take a "Wing Commander break" instead of a coffee break — it's cleansing, cathartic, and better for your heart...

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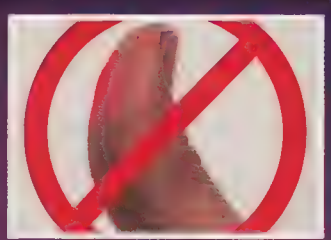

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EDITOR'S PICKS

Name: Bernie Yee
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Six Favorite Games of All Time: *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord, The Bard's Tale, Zork: The Great Underground Empire, Wasteland, Wing Commander, and Betrayal at Krondor*

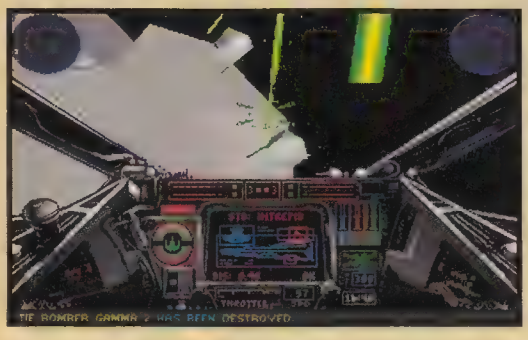
Betrayal At Krondor

Dynamix's *Riftwar: Betrayal at Krondor* is the first fantasy role-playing (FRP) game that I've stuck with — and enjoyed — all the way to the finish in a long, long time. *Krondor*'s engine uses a first-person perspective with 3-D polygon graphics, and well-rendered bitmapped images for combat and NPC interaction. *Krondor* is based on the best-selling fantasy fiction series written by Raymond E. Feist, and his collaboration with Dynamix on game development shines clearly throughout the game. Lots of prose, a captivating story line, and wonderful character interaction make *Krondor* a stay-up-late foray into a richly appointed world.

Betrayal at Krondor

X-Wing

X-Wing from **LucasArts** advanced the technology of space-combat simulation. *X-Wing*'s polygon graphics may not have the vivid detail of *Wing Commander* or *Privateer*, but the animation is smooth, smooth, smooth! The artificial intelligence of enemy pilots is impressive, and there's nothing that can match the feeling of swooping down over a massive Imperial Star Destroyer, strafing its shield generator towers, pulling up, twisting around, and heading in for another run. *X-Wing* make *you* the hero of *Star Wars*, a kid's dream-come-true if ever there was one. And aren't most computer gamers kids at heart?



X-Wing

Ultima VII: The Black Gate

Origin's *Ultima VII: The Black Gate* was a bold leap for FRPs. Unfortunately, Origin didn't look before they leapt, and the game was riddled with bugs. Well, *Ultima VII Part 2: The Serpent Isle* remedies many of those bugs, improves the engine, and takes us on a fascinating trip to a new continent. *Serpent Isle* proves just how far Origin is willing to take this series, as the Avatar and his companions embark on a quest to restore the balance of Chaos and Order, and foil the plans of the Guardian (again) in a new world populated by people who rejected Lord British's rule in Brittania. As usual, the excellent storyline is several cuts above what you find in the traditional "kill the ultimate bad guy" quest.

Privateer

Another **Origin** title I'll be playing for a while is *Privateer*. Set in the *Wing Commander* universe, the game puts you in the shoes of a privateer — mercenary, merchant, or pirate — during the time of the Kilrathi war. Like the classic game *Elite*, *Privateer* is "open-ended" on one level, allowing you to travel around many star systems looking for profit opportunities, hunting down pirates, hauling cargo, or even smuggling contraband. But once you stumble onto the main storyline, *Privateer* becomes a linear series of plot-advancing missions which range in difficulty from mindlessly easy to nearly impossible. *Privateer*'s bitmap graphics lack the smoothness of *X-Wing*, but on a fast machine the action can be very hot. General MIDI and Wave-Blaster support make for a state-of-the-art soundtrack, and the graphics are up to Origin's high standards.

Privateer

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis (CD-ROM version)

One game that I'll *never* have to worry about deleting from my hard drive is the CD-ROM version of *Indiana Jones and the Lost Fate of Atlantis*. **LucasArts** enhanced the original disk-based game with spoken dialogue, an improvement which adds an entirely new dimension to the game. The voice-acting is outstanding — the hero sounds *almost* like Harrison Ford — and the overall effect is like watching *and* participating in a "lost" Indiana Jones film. Two thumbs up.

MiG-29

Falcon 3.0 is now a fairly old product, but no challengers have emerged to topple it from its perch as the best jet-combat simulation. Further, **Spectrum Holobyte** has shown its commitment to this high-end product by releasing numerous bug patches and add-on disks. This year's add-on, *MiG-29*, allows F-16 pilots to experience the best the former Soviet Union had to put up against the Falcon — the MiG-29 Fulcrum. An impressively manueverable and quick fighter, the MiG is a good match against the F-16, and flying a Fulcrum against a live Falcon pilot is sure to bring out debates as to which craft is the best. *MiG-29* also included a super bug patch which updated your *Falcon 3.0* files. *MiG-29* turns *Falcon 3.0* into a whole new game, and I'll be flying it for some time to come.

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UNDER A
Killing Moon

THE FUTURE IS NOW

ACCESS SOFTWARE'S LATEST ADVENTURE WILL CHANGE THE WAY WE LOOK AT PC GAMES

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

The buzz grows louder every week. You can't pick up an issue of *Variety* — or any other Hollywood trade publication, for that matter — without seeing more and more references to "multimedia," "interactive video," or "interactive movies." There's confusion, of course, as to just what these things mean. But the mainstream entertainment industry seems to sense the massing of some technological tsunami, comparable to or even surpassing the impact of the VCR, gathering force just beyond the horizon. And while both the conventional media and the computer entertainment field are unclear as to what this technological change will become, the consensus is that whatever It turns out to be, It will be as important as the advent of television. Everyone is taking It very seriously.

Redefining "State of the Art"

One game developer, **Access Software**, is ready to harness the new technology and make a quantum leap into the future with their soon-to-be-released "interactive movie," *Under a Killing Moon*. During a recent visit to the company's Salt Lake City headquarters, I saw a convincing demonstration that this upcoming CD-ROM release doesn't just "push the envelope" — it blows it to smithereens.

And Access, in turn, is being taken seriously by the movers and shakers of the movie and television world. A few days before my arrival, the legendary William Morris mega-agency had been on the phone, initiating negotiations.

"They know something very big is coming," said Steve Witzel, Access's vice-president of marketing. "They're a little vague, a little uncertain, about what it is. But they want to position themselves now to take advantage of future developments."

Blockbuster Video is also taking this product seriously: *Under a Killing Moon* will be the first CD-ROM product ever carried by the nationwide chain. It will be rented, just like any other movie, and promoted in-store by movie-style posters.

Brainstorming for *Killing Moon* began not long after the release of Access's most recent adventure program, *Amazon*. There was concern that the company's adventure games were not up to the same technological level as its hugely successful *Links* and *Links 386* golf simulations. A decision was made to go all-out — to produce something so advanced, so sensational, that every new product would have to aim for a higher standard — something that would redefine "state of the art."

From the beginning, the production team's goals

sation paths to be intrinsically interesting and entertaining. We wanted characters that you'd *want* to talk to, that were not just personified puzzles as is so often the case in computer games."

One result of this concept is that the game's characterizations have an "ensemble" quality; they seem to be real people who may or may not have useful information to impart, but who are always fun to converse with. Of course, the dialogue does have essential information needed to complete the game, but those elements have been embedded deep within situational contexts.

When you enter an environment where there's a character, you need only "walk" close to that character for the game to shift into conversation mode. Once dialogue is initiated, the player can adopt a wide range of attitudes, including such interesting ones as "sleazy bluff," "annoying," "macho," "brown-nosing," "groveling" and "pathetic blubbering." Each time you select a different mode, you get a different set of punch lines (or maybe just a punch!).

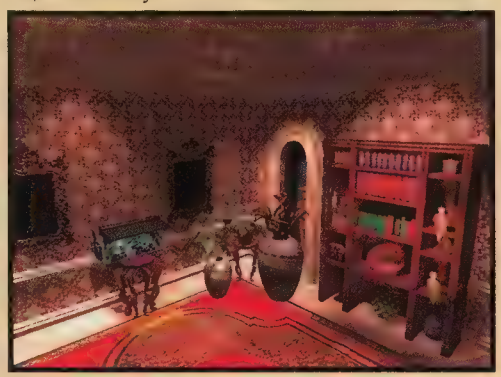
YOUR Show of Shows

Having spent such care on developing characters, the next and boldest step was to get actual Hollywood stars to play them. How better to create the illusion of a movie? Three major stars participated in the project: Brian Keith (as a gravel-voiced old detective), Margot Kidder (as a slinky femme fatale), and Russell Means (as one of the main villains).

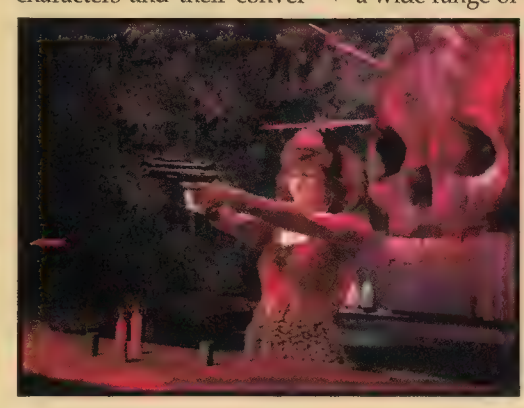
At first, the stars really had no idea what they were getting into. All of them were afraid they were about to be used for some kind of Nintendo-esque video game and, as one Access spokesman put it, "You don't want an actor of Brian Keith's stature to think you're about to turn him into Sonic the Hedgehog!"

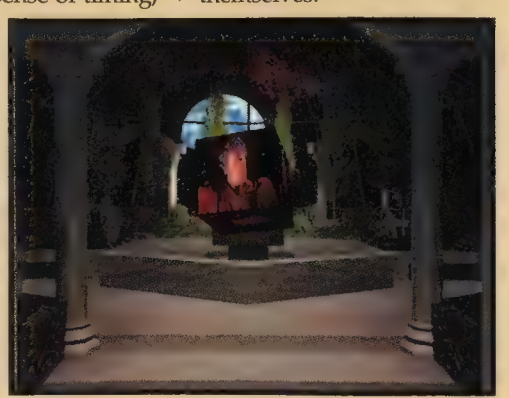
Once the actors actually saw the technology, all three were delighted to be part of this new genre. The sheer professionalism they brought to the script — the sense of timing, inflection, and gesture — makes the words come vibrantly to life. Their digitized images look and move very much as they would in a conventional film. Subjectively, the sensation of being in a movie with the likes of Margot Kidder adds a wonderful thrill to the gaming experience. You get the excitement of playing a role with famous stars, *and* you get a game full of characters of exceptional depth.

Under a Killing Moon opens with a surreal flashback to 1945, depicting a squad of GIs storming a castle-like German fortress. Inside the structure, they discover evidence of a secret cult that practices human sacrifice and other bloody, bizarre rites.



The game proper begins a century later, with a cut to detective Tex Murphy roaming the streets of his seedy, mutant-populated San Francisco neighborhood. When Tex takes on a case that at first seem to be a simple burglary, he soon finds himself enmeshed in something far deeper and more sinister involving the cult uncovered back in 1945. The cult, it turns out, has developed a deadly airborne virus which they intend to use to "cleanse" the Earth of all its inferior inhabitants. Safe in their space station, the cultists will then be able to reclaim the planet for themselves.





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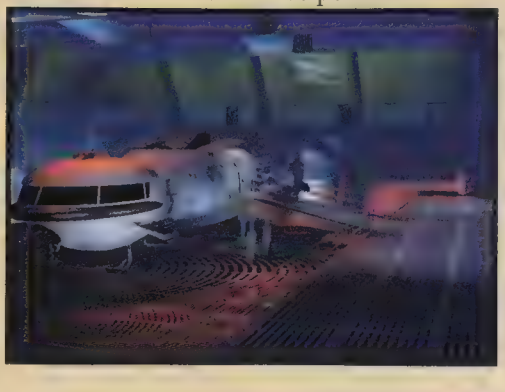
tered, from time to time, games and simulations that really *do* push the envelope and make us stare, open-mouthed, at the wonders on the screen. And I can truthfully say that *Under a Killing Moon* is something very special, that it does indeed set a new standard in role-playing adventures. Its graphics

are stunning in their degree of realism, and the interface is both transparent and intuitive. You use the mouse as legs: Move the mouse slowly, and the viewpoint changes as you'd expect it to while walking down the street; move it more vigorously, and the scenery moves past as a runner might see it. You can enter any room or environment and walk around inside it. Want to examine the calendar on the wall behind Tex's desk? Just walk up to it, and you're able to *see* what's written on it. That statue in the garden? You can stroll around it in a complete circle, peer up at the head, down at its pedestal.



In one novel plot twist, Tex is invited to join the cult and become one of the elect himself. Being something of a cynic, Tex is honestly tempted.

The above is only a bare-bones outline of an intricate, high-velocity plot packed with incident, action, and exotic locations. In visual style and overall tone, *Killing Moon* pays homage to the great film noir classics of the Forties and Fifties. Even the musical score hearkens back to the sort of hip, jazz-flavored music of composers such as Miklos Rosza (*Naked City*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, etc.) and Henry Mancini, who wrote the wonderfully sleazy theme for the "Peter Gunn" TV show.

The Hype Ends Here

After being thoroughly briefed on the production, I got a chance to do some hands-on playing. Enough of the program was finished that I could play ten almost-finished 15-minute segments—more than adequate to give me a real taste of the thing.

Now, let me say that we get to see a *lot* of games. And during the course of each twice-yearly Consumer Electronics Show, we hear a truckload of hype — some of it justified, a lot of it premature, and the rest just pure and simple cod- swallop. We've learned to develop a healthy sense of skepticism.

We have also encoun-

As you move through a scene, shadows and source lighting change exactly as they would in a real environment. You have to approach within inches of an object to see that it's a digitized image; when you get close to something, it doesn't become blurry and indistinct, nor does it dissolve into a mass of constituent pixels. The realism of texturing is astounding. You can see the grain in a wooden desk, the weave of a piece of cloth, and the gleam and apparent solidity of a marble step.

As for the digitized characters, their appearance and movement is as realistic as in a motion picture. They've been electronically "cut out" and placed in their game environments with extraordinary plausibility. For me, the sensation of interacting with them was convincing enough to be a little bit spooky.

And what a difference their professionalism makes as you listen to the dialogue! Conners has given them terrific lines, and their voices bring the story to life with crackling energy. Brian Keith is perfect as the burned-out old cop, and Margot Kidder's throaty delivery and wonderful timing make her, in my opinion, the most believable female character ever to appear in a computer game. "Acting" with pros like this is a role-playing treat indeed.

The branching dialogue has been handled so well — its tone just the perfect blend of hard-edged realism and smart-aleck provocation — that I found myself replaying most of the scenes four or five times, just to find out what happens in each conversational mode. And yes, I actually did select "pathetic blubbering" for a scene in which Tex is being roughed up by some of the bad guys. (And no, I won't tell you what happened!)

The quality and the sensual appeal of this game make for a wildly compelling adventure. *Under a Killing Moon* just sucks you right through the screen into its own exciting, dangerous world. We aren't yet able to play on the Holo-deck, folks, but this is the first signpost pointing in that direction.

Over the years, Access has maintained a fairly low profile within the PC entertainment industry. Though the company releases only a few titles each year, it has earned a very solid reputation for consistent quality and outstanding customer support. But when *Under a Killing Moon* hits the stores in early 1994, this small, low-key company is going to loom like a giant.

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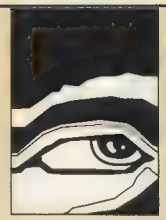
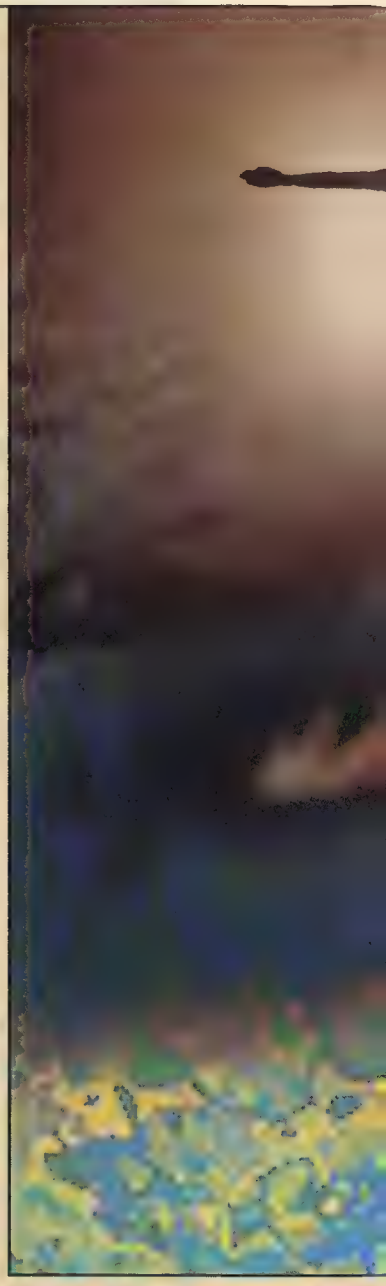


A LITTLE BIT O' CHEATIN'



T. LIAM MCDONALD

I hung my head in guilt the first time I did it.

I felt dirty, ashamed — a traitor to my profession.

Driven by pure frustration over my dwindling hit points in *Ultima Underworld II*, I'd furtively downloaded a "super-character file" from CompuServe and installed it in my game directory. I paused to wonder if CompuServe kept a list of people who downloaded these things, and whether or not they'd use that information against me next time I ran for public office. But I cast these concerns aside and loaded the file.

I started the game, and there was the character that every *Underworld II* player longs to be: arrayed in a full suit of magic armor, with a complete set of runes, stones, and magic weapons, just waiting to cut a swath through the Labyrinth of Worlds! I hefted my blade and sallied forth, serenely confident that *nothing* could stop me now.

I had cheated, pure and simple. And it felt...*good*!

The Things We Do To Win

Let's face some facts. Every gamer, at some point, has wanted to press a magic button to bring a character back to life, or to shove all his statistics to the max. You watch helplessly as your party's hit points are whittled away by an endless stream of foes. You begin to think designers do this deliberately just to artificially prolong game play, or maybe just to be sadistic. You see conspiracies in every orc or demon, and soon you're ready to pull your hair out and bang your head against the monitor. Just *once* you'd like to get past the first level without restoring your game four dozen times!

Sometimes you're just not in the mood for a challenge. Sometimes you just need to sit in front of the computer and succeed at something.

Enter the game aids. They're lurking on networks and bulletin boards like CompuServe, America On-Line, GEnie, Internet, and others, and these special files have been the salvation of many a frustrated gamer. Cheat programs, trainers, maps, saved games, and hint files are regularly among the top downloads in any system's Games forum. But questions persist. How do they work? What do they do? Do they damage programs? Do they crash?

The simplest cheat programs don't alter the game at all. For games like *Ultima* or *Syndicate*, there are dozens of saved games you can download that start you at the beginning of the game with points, weapons, and skills that might usually take hours of game play to develop. Your characters aren't totally invincible, but they are better than a start-up character ever could be.

Some games actually have cheats built right into the program. Often, this is done to expedite early testing as the program moves through the development process. The last few *Ultimas* have had extensive built-in cheats. In the case of *Serpent Isle*, for example, a cheat allows for instant travel to any part of the island, the editing of any NPC statistics, and instant access to any object in the game. *Sim City* comes with a money cheat that provides hopeful mayors with huge coffers, but punishes you if you ask for too much by taking it all away.

Not all developers, however, are so thoughtful as to leave their beta cheats in the finished version. And that's where the hackers come in.

Hacking and Slashing

There are some elements of game play that can only be altered by getting into the game's code and fiddling around. A role-playing character's statistics, for instance, are represented as a series of numbers in the saved-game files. Using a hexadecimal editor (an editor that can

read and alter the hex code used in computer programming), a knowledgeable hacker can go in and alter these numbers. Some cheats are much more complex, altering the structure of the program itself, while others operate as memory-resident programs and make changes while the game is played. They're often created by enthusiastic hackers, and the same few people seem to upload most of the cheats.

The saved-game editors are among the most common. One hacker has even provided gamers with a generic system for editing a wide variety of games. Jeff Heaton's MicroGenesis Software has developed the *Universal Game Cheating System*, which creates individual saved-game editors for separate games. The *UGCS* searches out the statistic a user wants to change — health, for instance — then

comes up with various ways to edit that statistic. Finally, it creates a small game editor so the user can change that stat whenever he desires. Many of these small editors find their way onto bulletin boards and are then used by other players.

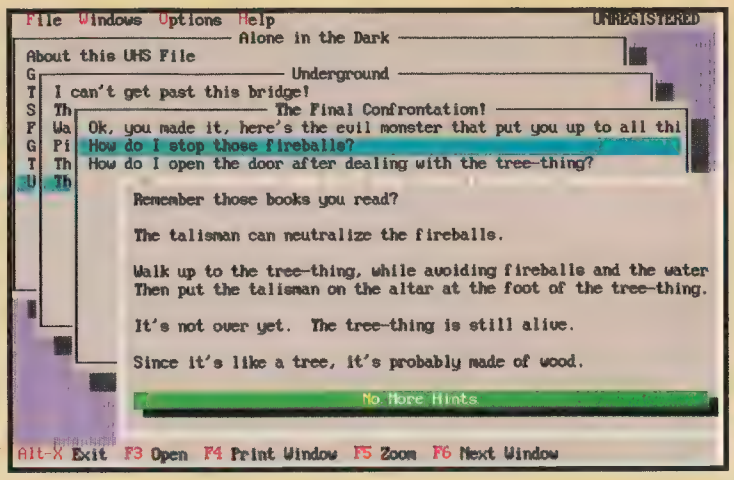
Changing the data in a saved game is a small, temporary solution. You're stronger, but you can still be killed. Some gamers demand something more complex and permanent, and Interactive Trainers can fit the bill. One designer of trainers, code-named "Network," has created popular cheats for *Dune 2*, *Prince of Persia 2*, *Flashback*, *Lands of Lore*, *Might and Magic 5*, *Space Hulk*, *X-Wing*, and others. "With a Trainer you have to get farther into the game code," Network says. "It's not just variables that you're dealing with, but *how* the game works and runs. Say your character's Health is 100. That's a variable. When you're hit, it has to drop. And there's a line of code in the game that does that. I can just *erase* that line of code."

The hackers work very hard to keep their programs from crashing or destroying game files, but there are always dangers. So whenever you load a cheat program, be sure to back up your game.

Get a Clue

If changing the programming code in your games seems a little extreme, maybe you'd be more comfortable with a hint or two. There are fellow gamers out there who are ready and willing to help. Text files abound on-line, including lists of booty, full maps, solutions to puzzles, and other tips.

One of the most popular hint programs is Jason Strautman's *Universal Hint System*, which can be downloaded from most networks. The *UHS* reads the tip files designed for it, allowing stepped access to continually more detailed clues. *UHS* clue files become ready a short time after most games are released, and are a boon to gamers who need a little clue but don't want to dial a 900 number or buy a full clue book. At $10 for the DOS version and another $5 for a disk containing all available hint files, *UHS* is a bargain when you consider that individual hint books regularly cost $10-$20.


File Windows Options Help
UNREGISTERED
Alone in the Dark
About this UHS File
Underground
I can't get past this bridge!
The Final Confrontation!
Ok, you made it, here's the evil monster that put you up to all thi
How do I stop those fireballs?
How do I open the door after dealing with the tree-thing?
Remember those books you read?
The talisman can neutralize the fireballs.
Walk up to the tree-thing, while avoiding fireballs and the water
Then put the talisman on the altar at the foot of the tree-thing.
It's not over yet. The tree-thing is still alive.
Since it's like a tree, it's probably made of wood.
No More Hints
Alt-X Exit F3 Open F4 Print Window F5 Zoom F6 Next Window

Live Fast, Die Hard

I loved loading up the *Ultima Underworld* saved-game file and playing as a super-Avatar for a while. It was good to go from victory to victory. But in the end I went back to my little leather-armored weeny of an Avatar.

Why?

Guilt was a small part of it: I hadn't *earned* that Avatar. And as the challenge of the game diminished, the thrill of dangerous exploration muted. I knew I could stand there and pound away at any conceivable monster and suffer little if any damage, and after a while it became boring and mechanical. So I went back to my milquetoast Avatar and his silly little sword, and dared the dungeons once more.

Hey, a guy has to live dangerously sometimes.

Top Ten CompuServe Cheat Programs

The Gamers Forum (GO GAMERS) on the CompuServe Information Network is a Mecca for gamers at their wits' ends. Here, they can — for the cost of connect time — download any number of programs designed to get them through their games. Trainers, super-character files, hints, and other aids await the desperate. The Gamers Forum offers hope!

What follows is a list of the top ten most popular cheat programs. Text files containing hints are not included, but many (most notably those for *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Ultima VII Part II*, and a number of Universal Hint System Files) are among the top downloads, with over 1000 accesses each. The program with the most available help was *Civilization*, with several dozen cheats.

- Universal Hint System Reader

Civilization, Unit & City Improvement

- *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, Full-Screen Character Editor 1.2
- *Ultima Underworld II*, Character Editor v 2.4

Ultima Underworld, Character Editor

- *Ultima VII*, Cheat Mode Enabler & Items List
- *Ultima Underworld*, Manna/Vitality Editor
- *Prince of Persia II*, Mega-Trainer
- *Civilization*, More Money
- *Ultima Underworld II*, Super Character File

In the Flight Simulator Forum (GO FSFORUM), cheat programs for *X-Wing* and *Wing Commander II* have each logged over 1000 downloads.

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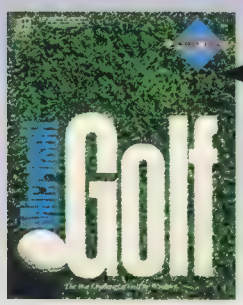

Championship Courses are compatible with LINKS, LINKS 386 Pro, & Microsoft Golf for Windows.

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Company-Josha Distributing
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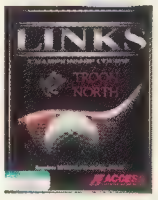
INGRAM MICRO

The new Super VGA version of Innisbrook's Copperhead was recently released in early August to join a lineup of LINKS Championship Courses unparalleled in golf simulation and all completely compatible with all versions of LINKS including Links 386 Pro and Microsoft Golf for Windows! LINKS Championship Courses include Firestone, Mauna Kea, Pinehurst, Banff Springs, Troon North, The Belfry, Dorado Beach, Bayhill Club, Barton Creek, and Bountiful.



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Product Information Number 101

METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT IN ARTIFICIAL FLIGHT ENVIRONMENTS AS FACILITATED BY THE USE OF REALISTIC PERIPHERALS

OR

THE BIG BOOK OF JOYSTICKS

Scott Wolf

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Please be seated, we have a lot of information to cover and only a few pages in which to do it.

My name is Scott Wolf, callsign Zuma, and I'm here on loan from the ZumaWolf Corporation to bring you up to speed on the concept of Peripherally Enhanced Flight Simulation Experience — or PEFSE, as we call it. Remember that.

When *PC Entertainment* first discussed this assignment with me, it was meant only as a "little joystick round-up." I accepted, with the primary intention of shaming those of you who think keyboard or mouse input offers realistic control in flight sims. (You know who you are.)

But as my research went on, I uncovered a veritable mountain of products whose sole purpose was to make flight sims more enjoyable and "real," and the scope of this project expanded to include the wealth of information I am about to bestow.

SECTION 1 PRIMARY SYSTEMS

Chapter 1: Joysticks

We all know that flight simulations are the only real reason for having a personal computer. Spreadsheets, Databases, CAD - they're all merely excuses for deductions every April 15th.

And the only real way to fly any flight simulation is with a joystick. Yokes are fine, too, but keyboard and mouse just don't cut it — *period*. If you're serious about your flight sims, you'll have to join the PEFSE generation.

The following is an across-the-board list of pistol-grip joysticks available at this time. Unless otherwise noted, they all come with standard trimmable, two-button configuration. Some also have Auto-Fire switches, but these are irrelevant for our purposes and are therefore not mentioned.

Note: All prices listed are Manufacturer's Suggested List Price

JS5 PREMIUM ($14.99) by PC Accessories: The JS5 Premium is the most economical

JS5 by PC Accessories

analog stick you can buy. It's a no-frills piece of hardware with a suction cup base that does its job surprisingly well. Don't confuse this with the digital (and therfore useless for flight-sim fans) JS4 model.

MICROGRIP ($19.95) by Kraft: Kraft's budget entry is molded in sexy matte black

MicroGrip by Kraft

and magenta with a comfortable grip and solid stick throw, but the buttons feel kind of flimsy. Suction cup base.

PC RAIDER ($19.95) and **PC COMMANDER** ($29.95) by STD Entertainment: These two budget-priced sticks are virtually identical except for the Commander's MegaZoom feature, which allows you to adjust the range of stick movement as well as axis trim. Both

PC Raider by STD

PC Commander by STD

have comfortable grips and suction cup bases.

NIGHT FORCE ($24.99) by Suncom: This one is a real handful. The thick gray stick has a relatively short X-axis (side to side) throw, and the reversable fire buttons have a sort of "vague" feeling. Otherwise it's pretty good. Suction cup base.

Night Force by Suncom

MERLIN ($27.99) by Wico: Comparable in size to the Night Force, the Merlin's huge, cobra-like stick nearly overpowers it's narrow suction cup base. It too has a somewhat abbreviated stick throw, but it gets the job done.

Merlin by Wico

THUNDERSTICK ($39.95) by Kraft: The Thunderstick represents a step up from the budget controllers. Its rounded triangular base sits solidly on the desk and requires no suction cups, although they are provided. It has a nice wide throw radius, a redundant third top button and a side-mounted throttle slider.

Kraft Thunderstick

FX 2000 ($39.99) by Suncom: Another stick-and-throttle combo, but with some unique features. Equipped with suction cups, the FX 2000 is also very comfortable when hand held. The sculpted base puts the throttle wheel up front, within thumb's reach, and the grip can be angled on its shaft to accommodate right- or left-handers.

ANALOG ($39.00) and **ANALOG PRO** ($59.95) by Gravis: The basic Analog comes with two buttons on its wide, flat base and one atop the oddly undersized stick. The Pro has three buttons on the stick and two on the base. The base buttons can be configured to any of four functions, either mimicking those on the stick or buttons 1 and 2 of a second joystick. There's also a throttle wheel and tension adjustment for the stick, ranging from free-floating to firm. A disk with calibration utilities is included.

FLIGHTSTICK ($69.95) and **FLIGHTSTICK PRO** ($99.95) by CH Products: The Flightstick is quite simply the finest two button joystick on the market. It is reliable and smooth, with positive feedback from the buttons and a throttle wheel mounted on the top surface of the wide, square base. Joining the Flightstick is the brand new Flightstick Pro, which is basically a Flightstick with an enlarged head sporting two extra, independantly functioning buttons and a "coolie hat" switch to manipulate external views, much like the Thrustmaster FCS. The Flightstick Pro is ultra-modern in design and a top quality product. Includes utility disk.

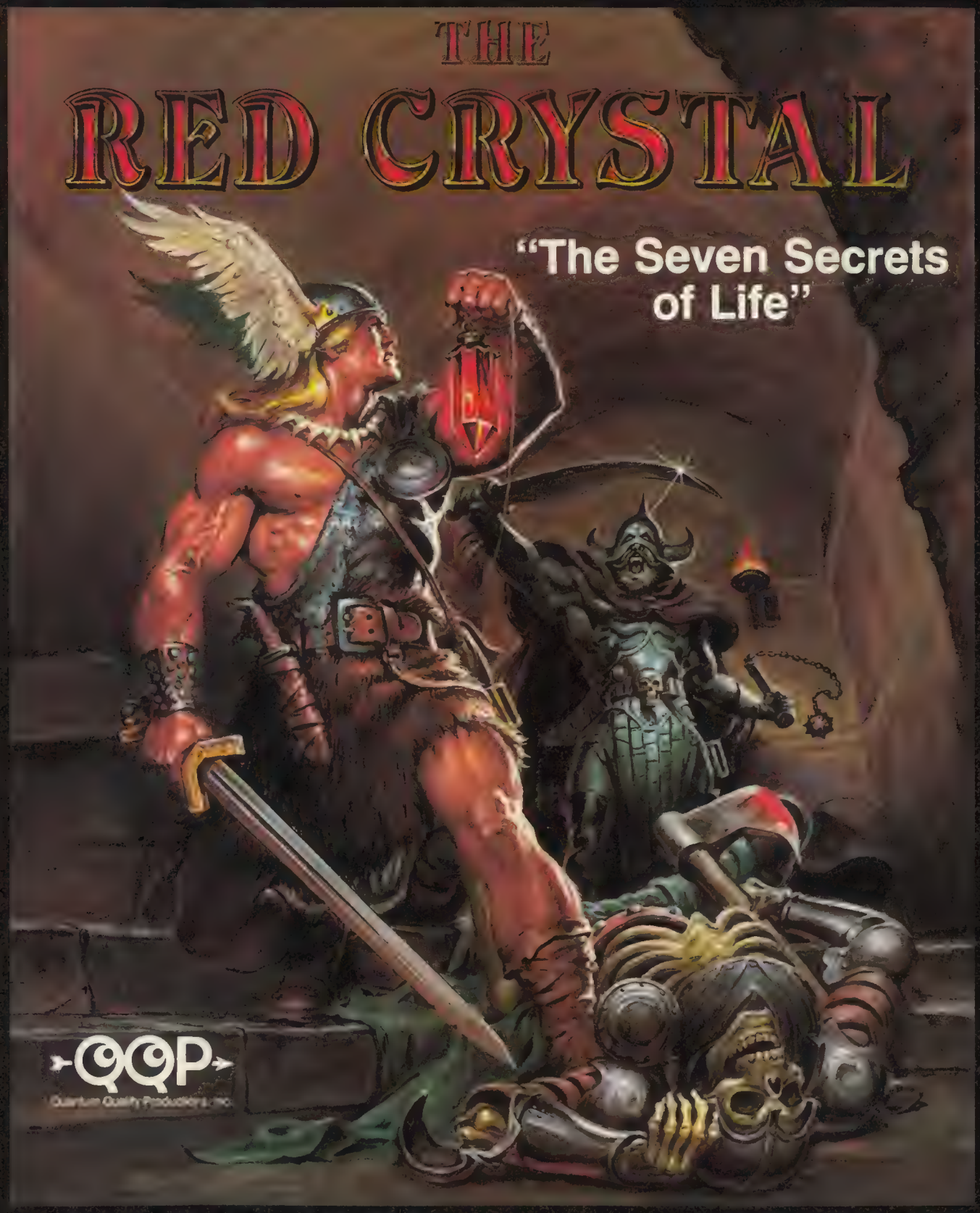
FX 2000 by Suncom

FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM ($99.95) and **PRO FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM** ($149.95) by Thrustmaster: The FCS is the originator of the four buttons with hat setup, modeled after the actual control stick of the F-4 Phantom II. The extra buttons mean two less keystrokes, and after a few minutes you'll wonder how you ever did without one. The Pro FCS has a black anodized aluminum base, aluminum gimbal mechanism, and progressive-loading torsion springs, which increase resistance as more pressure is applied. Non-trimmable, but the ultimate in classic cool.

Analog Pro by Gravis

APS-2001 COBRA COMPUTERSTICK ($89.95) by Maxximum: Although not available at press time, the Cobra stands ready to revolutionize the concept of control sticks. It's a fully programmable, microprocessor-controlled optical joystick that works through the keyboard port. It works with any program that accepts keyboard input, and has 25 programmable functions and can store up to 127 keystrokes per program. No game cards or drivers needed.

CH Flightstick



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Product Information Number 104

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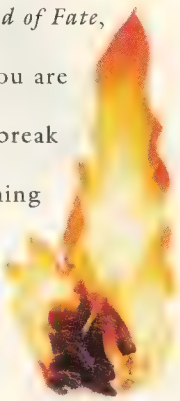
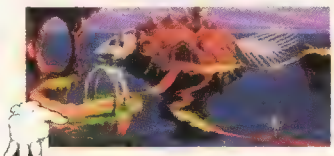
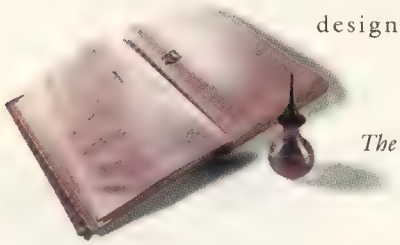
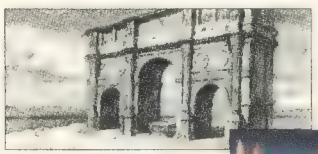
KISS CONVENTIONAL LOGIC GOODBYE

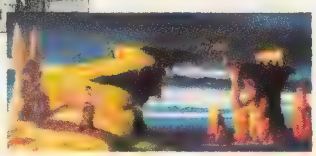
Now you see it. Now you don't. The land of Kyrandia is disappearing piece by piece and all the evidence points toward one perilous conclusion: a curse. Thus begins *The Hand of Fate*, second in the *Fables & Fiends*™ series, where you are the offbeat, young mystic who must voyage to the center of the world to break the spell. Out of sync and out on foot, your aberrant journey reveals nothing is what it seems. Everything is what it isn't. And you can count your friends on one hand. Literally. Conspiring to push the twisted edge of cinemagraphic entertainment, Westwood Studios has designed more puzzles and gameplay in the first few chapters of *The Hand of Fate* than in all of *The Legend of Kyrandia*™. The most advanced graphics on the market are first pencil tested, then painted on-screen to surrealistic perfection. Breakthrough *Trulight* technology illuminates each scene more cinematically for a fuller, fourth dimensional picture. The new *State of Mind System*, along with superior intuitive interfacing, enables you and over 50 characters to change your mind, mood and mayhem based on preceding events. Don't just play with your mind. Change the way your mind plays. Grasp *The Hand of Fate* and kiss conventional logic goodbye.





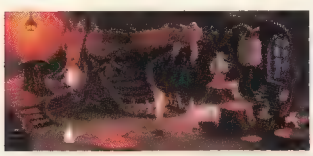






Shadow

Sunlight



THE HAND OF FATE

Westwood STUDIOS

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CH Flightstick Pro

Chapter 1a: HOTAS

Many simulations allow you to use a second joystick to control your throttle, weapons, and other functions. It's called HOTAS (Hands On Throttle And Stick), and it's Pretty Good PEFSE. What *we're* after is Damned Good PEFSE...

Thrustmaster FCS

WEAPONS CONTROL SYSTEM MARK I ($99.95) and **MARK II** ($149.95) by Thrustmaster: The WCS is a keyboard emulator modeled after the throttle quadrant of the F-15 Eagle. It has six buttons and a three-way rocker switch, all mounted on a handle which rocks back and forward. The Mk I (with a UPROM chip) and Mk II both allow you to configure the throttle and button functions to suit your programs and personal preferences, but the Mk II is more versatile and allows you to remap the functions of the FCS buttons as well. The WCS is a mixed blessing, however; once you get used to it, you'll completely forget how to fly with the keyboard!

EPIC ($387.45) by R & R Electronics: The Extended Programmable Input Controller (EPIC) is a microprocessor-based joystick control system that provides support for up to 8 analog channels and 128 buttons, customizable "progressive rate" controls, joystick mapping, and extensive button programming. It consists of a controller board, which installs in a standard 8-bit expansion slot and acts just like a standard joystick controller, and an external box which connects to both the controller board and the keyboard port. Your keyboard, joystick, throttle and rudder pedals all plug into the box. It's compatible with all standard 2-axis, 2-button joysticks, but the Flightstick Pro, Thrustmaster FCS, and WCS need to be modified for full compatibiity (R & R will do it for about $30 each). Very sophisticated, Hardcore PEFSE stuff.

Chapter 2: Yokes

While combat flying with a yoke may be less exciting to some, simulators like *IFT-PRO*, Elite from Azursoft and *FS4* pretty much demand a yoke for proper PEFSE.

Thrustmaster Pro FCS

Where yokes really come to life, though, is in driving games. There's simply no way a joystick can duplicate the action of a steering wheel, but yokes do it exceedingly well. Check out these dudes:

MOUSE YOKE ($34.95) by Colorado Spectrum: Just strap your mouse into this lightweight unit, and the

APS-2001 Cobra by Maxximum

yoke shaft maneuvers the mouse's tracking ball. There's no centering routine, but the Mouse Yoke is a cheap, effective alternative to traditional yokes. Also

Thrustmaster WCS Mk II

available as the MOUSE WHEEL ($39.95), a 10.5-inch steering wheel which operates identically.

THE CONTROLLER ($59.99) by Addison Technology & PC Accessories: Unavailable at press time, The Controller's yoke is mounted on a vertical shaft, which pivots at the base and can be locked upright for driving sims, allowing you to use using rudder pedals for accelerator and brake. It also has a throttle slider on its diamond-shaped suction cup base.

Mouse Yoke by Colorado Spectrum

MAXX TWO ($79.00) by Maxximum: The Maxx Two is a trim, cream-colored unit with a sliding shaft, front throttle slider, and fire buttons at the handle tips. It doesn't require a lot of space, and works just fine.

G-FORCE ($89.99) by Suncom: The G-Force would look equally at home in a B-17 or a *Star Wars* Y-Wing. Like The Controller, the grips are mounted on a lockable, base-pivoting vertical column. Throttle, button signal switcher, and four fire buttons are positioned at your finger- and thumbtips. The

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Mouse Wheel by Colorado Spectrum

base comes with both suction cups and clamps, and works well either way.

VIRTUAL PILOT ($109.95) by CH Products: This is a sturdy, elegant sliding shaft unit with a throttle on top of the main box. Like CH's Flightsticks, it functions flawlessly and works particularly well with *World Circuit*. The top throttle makes keyboard placement a problem, but it's worth it.

The Controller by Addison Technology

FLIGHT DECK PROFESSIONAL ($139.95) by Yates Avionics: This British yoke isn't available in the U.S. yet, but it's a high-quality unit made of tubular black metal with a black plastic cowling and foam-padded grips. Precision calibrated prior to shipping, it requires no trimming and also features an aluminum throttle lever on the right side. No spring centering either, but extremely smooth and unique.

YM-1 ($299.95) and **YM-2** ($750-ish) by ThunderSeat Technologies. The YM (Yoke Module)-2 is virtually identical to the FAA certified 610 IFR trainer by ATC. Consequently, it's PEFSE rating is unusually high. When used with ThunderSeat's optional 3-Lever High Performance Power Quadrant ($395.95), View Control Module ($299.95) and FS4 (and soon, FS5), the realism is startling. The YM-1 is the same yoke mechanism but without any of the front panel switches, and is upgradable to the YM-2. A Beechcraft King Air yoke, molded from the real thing, and featuring a two-way rocker switch, built-in trackball and Beechcraft quartz chronometer is available for about $595.00.

Chapter 2a: Adapters & Cables

Notebook users, rejoice! Joystick and yoke support is here, through either serial or parallel ports...

MAXX Two by Maxximum

NOTEBOOK GAMEPORT ($49.95) by Colorado Spectrum: The Notebook Gameport allows you to connect a yoke or joystick and rudder pedals to your Notebook through the serial port, while providing a pass-through for your serial mouse. It's an elegant solution, and an equally elegant piece of hardware. It fully supports *Aces Over Europe*, *F-15 III*, *F-117A*, *World Circuit*, and more. Thrustmaster FCS is supported, but not the CH Flightstick Pro (yet). It can also be used on desktop PCs that don't have a game card.

PARALLEL GAME PORT ($45.00) by Genovation: The Parallel Game Port can also be used on both Notebook and desktop PCs, and allows you to redefine standard joystick switches and special analog switches like the Flightstick Pro and FCS "hat switch." About 44 games are supported, including *X-Wing*, *Tornado*, and *World Circuit*. Sound is only through the PC speaker at this time, but they're working on it.

X and **Y CABLES** ($11.95 & $12.95) by CH Products: The X Cable is a durable ten-foot extension for any joystick, while the Y Cable is a high quality adapter that lets two joysticks work simultaneously, supporting four buttons through both connectors.

G-Force by Suncom

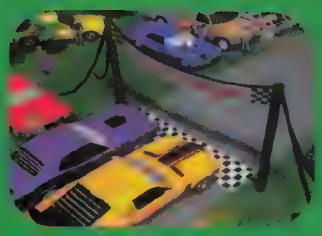
Chapter 3: Rudder Pedals

If you've actually used your rudders from the keyboard, you know what a deadly difference they can make when lining up a shot or setting up a landing. Why not do it right?

MAXX PEDALS ($64.00) by Maxximum: Although the Maxx Pedals are incredibly small and lightweight, they actually perform quite well. The base is made of molded plastic and cardboard and is only 10 inches wide, meaning

CH Virtual Pilot

Around here nice guys don't finish last - they don't even finish. Better know how to drive or Catfish Louie and company will take turns making your Backroad Racer a pile of twisted, burning wreckage. Then taunt you as you watch instant replays of your wipeouts. Video clips give hints and make threats while you try to outrun cops and race on four different tracks. Use 3-D animated instructions to build a model of your car so it's easier to identify the torched remains. Available for IBM on CD-ROM.



The model makes the game better. The game makes the model better.

After you build your car you can follow all traffic laws and be a safe & courteous driver.

{Of course, you could also go play an action-packed game of hopscotch with your sister.}

Video clips just like this one make the game extra bad. But in a good way.

Flight Deck Professional by Yates Avionic

that your feet sit about two inches apart. But if money and space are at a premium, try these.

RUDDER CONTROL SYSTEM ($149.95) by Thrust-master: The RCS is a beautiful unit made of gold-anodized aluminum with black hardware and molded ABS plastic foot-rests. Your feet sit about four inches off the floor and a luxurious 13 inches apart. The unit weighs about 7 1/2 pounds. My personal favorite.

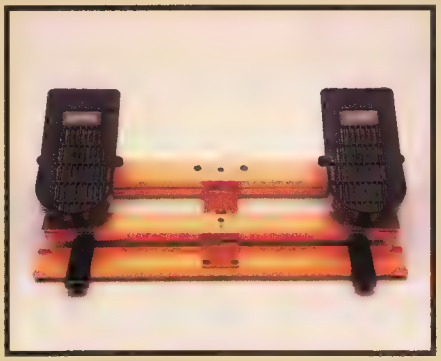
Notebook Gameport by Colorado Spectrum

FLIGHT DECK PROFESSIONAL ($114.95) by Yates Avionics: Will be available seperately or as a set with the FDP Yoke ($229.95), when U.S. distribution is arranged. It features the same tubular black metal construction as the yoke, but with a very light spring centering. Your feet sit only about four inches apart, but the light touch required cuts down on fatigue. A switch on the FDP's plug deactivates your yoke's Y-axis, and enables the pedals to function as forward and back (gas and brake — get it?) with no special software. This stuff is delicate but strong, and obviously made with great care.

THUNDER-FLIGHT RUDDERS ($299.95) by ThunderSeat: Once again, ThunderSeat strikes a blow for ultra-realism. Their pedal set is the only one with progressive-loading resistance, requiring increased force the more the pedal is depressed. These are the same rudders used in ATC's FAA approved simulators, and they weigh in at about 20 pounds! They'll soon be available with toe brakes for FS5, and a strong DC motor for realistic active feedback.

Parallel Game Port by Genovation

Maxx Rudder Pedals and Yoke



Thrustmaster RCS

SECTION 2 SECONDARY SYSTEMS

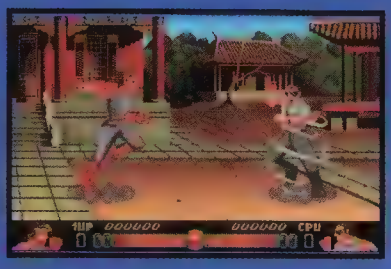
Chapter 4: Seats & Cockpit Accessories

It goes without saying that you've got a sound card and speakers. You've probably even got some sort of chair. But don't stop there...

THRUSTMASTER COCKPIT ($695.00) by Thrust- master: This full-scale F-16C "office" has more options than you can shake a stick at — if that's your idea of a good time. Your $695 buys the Basic Cockpit structure, drawings for side panels, and speaker equipment specs. Other options include SWITCH KIT & CONTROLLER ($449). This add-on comes with 64 heavy-duty switches to control the functions on the cockpit panels, as well as a wiring harness, microprocessor module, and color side panels. You can also purchase SEAT PADS ($199). Yep, they're extra. But they'll give you a covered foam seat, back, and headrest cushions. The SHOULDER HARNESS ($99) is a black nylon lap and shoulder restraint. If you spring for the EXTERNAL FIBERGLASS SHELL ($975), a fuselage-shaped enclosure with decals, don't forget the LADDER ($149). It makes for easier ingress and egress.

THUNDERSEAT PRO ($209.95) by ThunderSeat Technologies: Connect the eight-inch subwoofer under the seat of this padded, double-walled polyethelene chair to your amplified

BODY BLOWS



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---CU Amiga, U.K.

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Product Information Number 147

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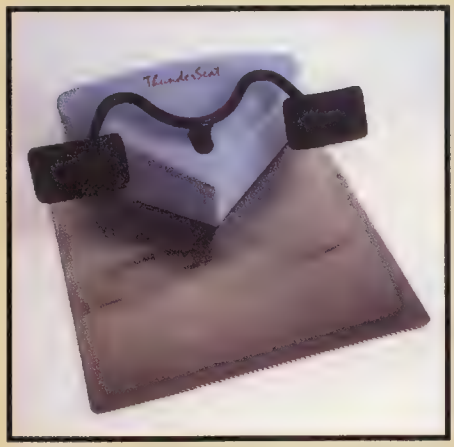
Thrustmaster Cockpit (external)

Thrusmaster Basic Cockpit

sound source, and literally *feel* the punch of the Strike Eagle's afterburners, the recoil of the Messerschmitt's 20-



Thunderseat rudder pedals

mm cannon, and the terrifying turbulence of AAA fire. A simple concept, but a truly awesome effect. Options include SIDE CONSOLES ($129), free-standing consoles to mount joysticks, throttles, and a swing-away keyboard holder; a KEYBOARD HOLDER ($69.95) which is mounted on the front of the console; MONITOR COWLING SHELL ($349.95), a monitor-framing enclosure which simulates aircraft dashboard; SUPERVIEW 180 FRESNEL and LENS ($299.95), which fits over any size monitor (up to 21") which not only enlarges the image, but also changes your point of focus from the surface of the screen to infinity to create a more realistic 3D effect.

Coming soon is ROLLING THUNDER (around $350), a five-point wheeled office chair variant of the ThunderSeat Pro, and the THUNDERMAX COCKPIT (under $1000). The latter will be offered with military specification switches for all aircraft functions, and removable templates to configure the aircraft of your choice.

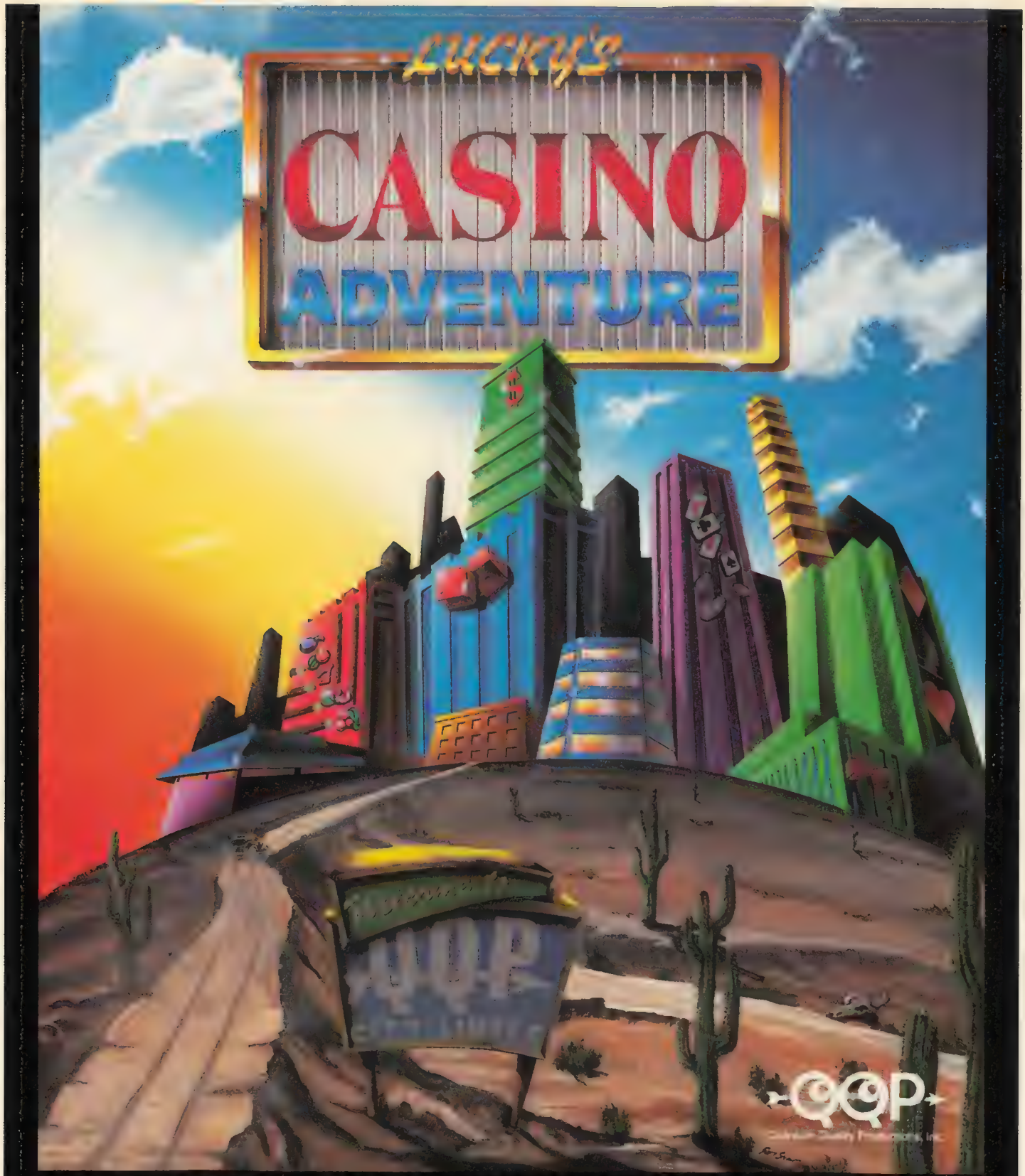
Chapter 5: Voice Recognition

Imagine going "Fence In" over Iraq, and noticing an aircraft

Thunderseat cowling shell

blip at 40 miles out on your Tactical Early Warning System. Better give AWACS a call. You key the mike and say clearly, "Status Report." The radio crackles back, "Chicks 110, 40." Cool, they're ours....

VOICE COMMANDER ($19.00) by Island Imaging: A simple software package for voice recognition in *F-117A*, *F-15 III*, or *Flight Simulator 4*, it allows up to 30 recognizable commands and push-to-talk



It is vacation time . . . you can sit at home watching the grass grow or enter our world . . . LUCKY'S CASINO ADVENTURE. This could just be your lucky break. Everyone can "win", but only the best can hold out for the full three weeks. Travel between the many casinos, have a bite to eat and rest in the hotels. Nothing has been left out in this state of the art experience of a lifetime.

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or by writing to:
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Flemington, NJ 08822

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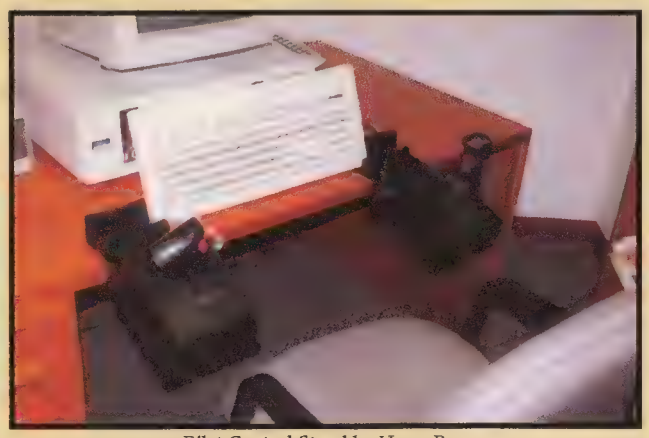
Thunderseat with consoles

Thunderseat with consoles, keyboard holder, cowling, and rudder pedals

from either keyboard or Thrustmaster WCS. Voice Commander comes with a 12-page manual, a program disk, and even a blank for creating the necessary boot disk. You'll need a Radio Shack tie-tack microphone (#33-1063) or compatible. Works well, and tech support is outstanding.

VOICE BLASTER ($119.95) by Covox: A much more complex—and expensive—package than Voice Commander, and it's *not* flight-sim specific. Ships with a headset mike, E/Q module, software, and two extensive manuals for DOS and Windows Voice Blasting. Not as user-friendly as Voice Commander, but if you've got the time and the aptitude, give it a try.



Pilot Control Stand by Home Base

SECTION 3 TERTIARY SYSTEMS

Chapter 6: Joystick & Keyboard Holders

Maybe you just don't have enough room on your desk for a joystick. Maybe you do, but it's not very comfortable to fly that way. Boy, are you lucky....

PILOT CONTROL STAND ($28.95) by Home Base: This cool product mounts to the front of your desk, and not only positions the control stick right over your lap, but also supports your keyboard in an upright position, much like a cockpit control panel.

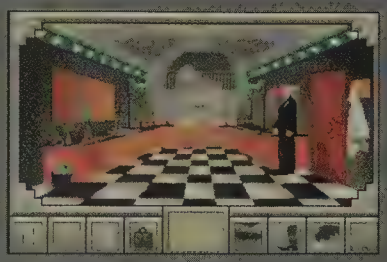
ARMREST BRACKETS FOR THRUSTMASTER CONTROLS ($89.95 per pair) by Interface Dynamics: A complete system for supporting all Thrustmaster controls on a wide variety of office chairs. Fully adjustable brackets for FCS, WCS & RCS. For another $9.95, you can get a set of working drawings for the Rudder Pedal Bracket and a list of compatable chairs. An assembled Rudder Pedal Bracket is $189.95.

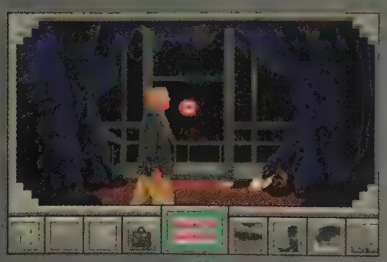
Chapter 7: Keyboard Overlays

The only drawback to having so many different aicraft at your disposal is the overwhelming variety of control configurations. There's nothing like trying to shake an IR missile, punching Flare, and watching your Flaps deploy instead. While most simulations give you a key reference card and some even provide an overlay, what you really need is a complete set of interchangeable templates for your keyboard. Hey, guess what....

PREMIUM TEMPLATES ($11.95) by Keyboard Commander Corp: Over 20 of these high-quality templates are available, with more on the way. They have a shaded, 3-D appearance, and include all key commands as well as legend boxes with symbology for all functional displays. The layout is basically the same from sim to sim, and the keys are grouped into color-coded categories for quick, easy reference. Available for *Aces of the Pacific, Aces Over Europe, A-10 Tank Killer, ATP, B-17 Flying Fortress, F-117A Nighthawk, F-15 Strike Eagle II, F-15 Strike Eagle III, Falcon 3.0/ 3.01, MiG-29, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, Gunship 2000, Comanche: Maximum Overkill, Flight*

World War II. The Nazis kicked our ass. KRONOLOG, 2020 A.D. Now it's our turn.





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Baseline Publishing	35	138
CH Products	IBC	127
Dynamix	12-13	145
Electronic Arts	28-29	140
Impressions	5,21	180
Logitech	11	216
Mallard	33	132
Merit Software	55	220
Microleague	51	147
Mindcraft	17	230
New World Computing	27	241
Origin	47,69	102
QQP	7,23,43,53	104
Revell-Monogram	49	120
Sigma Designs	IFC-1	142
Sir-Tech	3	111
SSI	BC	113
Triax	25	138
Velocity	9	148
Virgin Interactive	44-45	116

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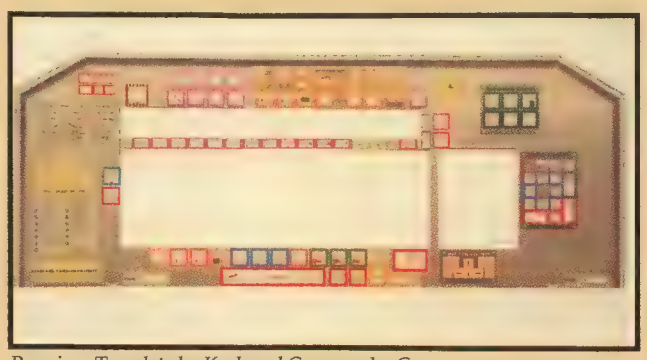


Premium Template by Keyboard Commander Corp.

Simulator 4.0, Flight Simulator 5, Jetfighter I & II, Megafortress, Strike Commander, Tornado, and *X-Wing*. Keyboard Commander also offers a complete set of *Falcon 3.0* & *MiG-29* utilities, which are commercial upgrades of the popular shareware programs, for $19.95, or $24.95 with a *Falcon* template.

Chapter 8: By The Book

OK, let's say you've got your own complete cockpit with multiple function joystick, throttle quadrant, rudder pedals, and vibrating seat, and you still get shot down by the greenest Gomers in the sky. You're doing something wrong and you don't know what it is....

STRATEGY GUIDES ($19.95) by Prima Publishing: Prima offers a first-rate lineup of official, authorized strategy guides for most of the great flight sims. More than just "cheat sheets," they offer invaluable background detail, historical overviews, and interviews with the games' designers. If these guides don't increase your enjoyment and improve your scores, you might want to consider another line of work.

- *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* $19.95
- *Jetfighter II* $19.95
- *Falcon 3.0* w/disk $27.95
- *Stunt Island* $19.95
- *Gunship 2000* $19.95
- *Dynamix' Great War Planes* $19.95
- *Lucasfilm Games Air Combat* $19.95
- *X-Wing* $19.95
- *Wing Commander I* and *II* $19.95
- *F-15 Strike Eagle III* w/disk $24.95
- *Flight Simulator 5* $19.95

Osborne/McGraw-Hill also publishes an excellent guide book for Falcon 3.0 titled (what else?) FALCON 3.0 AIR COMBAT ($19.95).

WIND-UP

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the products in this guide is the new lease on life they give to your software collection. The addition of any one of them — from keyboard templates to a complete cockpit and sound system — will send you back to re-experience your favorite simulations from a whole new perspective.

Well, that's it. I thank you for your time, and I hope that you've found this information both enlightening and entertaining. If you have any questions, feel free to contact either myself or the manufacturers listed below.

Now get back out there and make yourselves proud. And don't forget to *check six!*

APPENDIX A: LISTING OF MANUFACTURERS

Advanced Gravis Computer Technology Ltd.
#101 — 3750 North Fraser Way
Burnaby, B.C.
Canada V5J 5E9
(604) 431-5020

CH Products
970 Park Center Dr.
Vista, CA 92083
(619) 598-2518

Colorado Spectrum
748 Whalers Way,
E-201
Fort Collins, CO 80525
(303) 225-1663

Covox
675 Conger St.
Eugene, OR 97402
(503) 342-1271

Genovation
17741 Mitchell North
Irvine, CA 92714
(714) 833-3355

Home Base Products
3025 Timberline Dr.
Eugene, OR 97405
(503) 686-1809

Interface Dynamics
P.O. Box 858
Wolfeboro, NH 03894
(603) 569-4638

Island Imaging
201 Plantation Club Dr.
#1012
Melbourne, FL 32940
(407) 255-9327

Keyboard Commander Corp.
4839 S.W. 148 Ave.
Suite 402
Davie, FL 33330
(305) 389-4282

Kraft Systems
450 W. California Ave.
Vista, CA 92083
(619) 724-7146

The Maxximum Company
205 20th St. South
Nampa, Idaho 83686
(208) 465-4606

Osborne/McGraw-Hill
2600 Tenth St.
Berkeley, CA 94710-9938
(800) 227-0900

PC Accessories
4119 Billy Mitchell Dr.
Dallas, TX 75244-2316
(214) 991-2582

Prima Publishing
P.O. Box 1260
Rocklin, CA 95677-1260
(916) 786-0426

R & R Electronics
5601 Seminary Rd.
Suite 7
Falls Church, VA 22041
(703) 931-0800

STD Entertainment
110 Lakefront Dr.
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(410) 785-5661

Suncom Technologies
6400 W. Gross Point Rd.
Niles, IL 60714-4568
(708) 647-4040

ThunderSeat Technologies
6630 Arizona Circle
Los Angeles, CA 90045
(310) 410-0022

Thrustmaster
10150 S.W. Nimbus Ave.
Suite E-7
Tigard, OR 97223
(503) 639-3200

Yates Avionics
50 Cemetary Rd.
Cannock
Staffs. WS11 2QH
England
(11) 44 (0543) 500018

THE COMPUTER THAT DRIPPED BLOOD:

HORROR GAMES COME OF AGE

T. LIAM MCDONALD

"For the cemeteries shall be their cathedrals, and the cities shall be your tombs" — *Demons*

Vampires suck blood and life from their prey. Zombies shamble from their graves in a mindless quest for *someone* to eat. Werewolves howl at the moon, witches curse the unwary, and demons try to claim innocent souls. Family curses are passed from generation to generation, and eldritch terrors try to dominate the earth they once ruled. Empty houses beckon us inside, then refuse to let us leave.

Fear and horror, doom and dread, blood and guts: These have long been popular staples of horror fiction and film. The massive success of writers like Stephen King, Clive Barker, Peter Straub, and Anne Rice, as well as the steady stream of splatter flicks released to video each year, make it quite clear that we *like* to be scared. We thrive on the thrill of fear, the adrenaline rush of terror. Now, these worlds of horror are moving into the computer gaming realm.

With a vengeance.

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." — H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*

The exploration of the unknown — or of the familiar suddenly turned sinister — is at the core of most good horror. H.P. Lovecraft's heros were usually driven mad while delving into the occult, unable to handle the knowledge they sought. We all want to step through the creaking

The Uninvited

doorway and into the place where savage things lurk unseen, ready to destroy us. We *want* to drive the stake through the vampire's heart

or blow the zombie's head off *ourselves*.

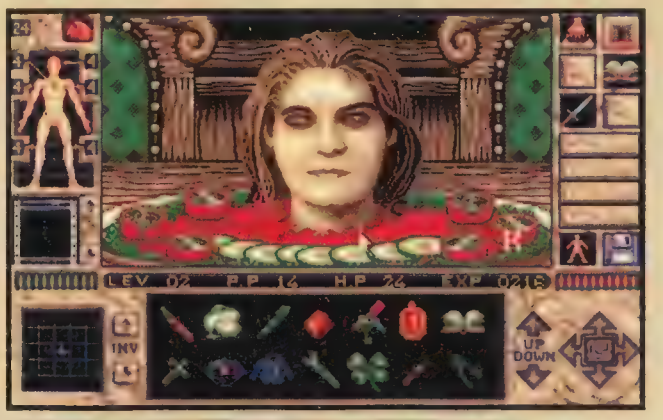
Now, computer game developers have slowly caught on to the potential audience for horror games, and more major horror games were released or announced in 1993 than in the entire history of computer gaming.

There have always been some horror games—ICOM's *The Uninvited* and Infocom's text-game *The Lurking Horror* spring to mind. But the past year has seen a veritable renaissance of horror gaming. It would be easy to attribute this boom to the success of *The 7th Guest* and its imitators, but more is at work here.

In his seminal work on modern horror, *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King observed that, "I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud." Since computer games are primarily visual, the trend has long been to "go for the gross-out," and the first queen of the gross-out was undoubtedly Elvira.

"The good news is your dates are here, the bad news is they're dead." —*Night of the Creeps*

Created by England's **HorrorSoft** and released stateside by **Accolade**, *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark* looked at first glance like just another media tie-in. Sure, the buxom Elvira promised a bit of titillation, but few were ready to take this game seriously.



Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus

But looks can be deceiving. The first-person perspective gave gamers a window on a world straight out of a B-movie. It was a Joe Bob Briggs' wet dream. Communication with other characters was minimal; most of the things you met in the course of the game seemed more intent on slashing you to bits than talking. And that slashing could get pretty intense, as blood flew in great gouts and splatters. Elvira showed up now and then to display her assets and quip a bit, but the stars of this blood feast were the gory graphics and nonstop barrage of monsters. It was a pretty bold new step.

The follow-up, *Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus*, toned down the gore and muddled the plot, and was not quite as satisfying as it could have been. "Mistakes" in game play could often stop a player dead in his tracks, unable to proceed further because he'd used a piece of string he should have saved.

HorrorSoft's third outing, however, gained back a lot of lost ground. *Waxworks* ditched Elvira but kept the distinctive look of the previous games. Set in a creepy wax exhibit in a strange, cursed house, the game featured five full game worlds to explore: Jack the Ripper's London; Ancient Egypt; a Cemetery and Church; a Mine filled with...*things*; and the Waxworks itself, which formed the backdrop the overall adventure. There still wasn't as much blood and gore as in the original *Elvira*, but the creepy mood and barrage of monsters was vintage HorrorSoft.

"When there's no more room in hell, the dead shall walk the earth." —*Dawn of the Dead*

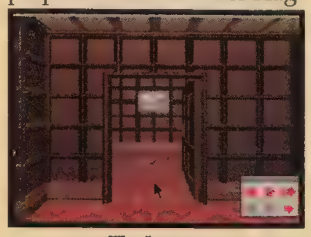
This banner year for horror gaming didn't begin as impressively as it ended. It began, in fact, with a loud thud, courtesy of **Capstone**'s *The Dark Half*, loosely based on the movie that was loosely based on the novel by Stephen King. Now doomed to roam the software discount racks, *The Dark Half* is one of those rare games that manages to eschew logic, form, style, craft, and quality. Failing totally to

Elvira, mistress of the Dark

The Legacy

capture the psychological subtleties of either King's doppleganger novel or the gripping suspense of George Romero's film, *The Dark Half* is merely a footnote in the history of horror games.

Millennium fared better with its offering *Daughter of Serpents*. Though a bit simplistic, it was buoyed by stylish graphics, a unique design, and a plot reminiscent of the pulp stories of H. Rider Haggard. *Daughter of Serpents* brings us an Egyptian cult seeking to resurrect the old gods, with predictably dire results.

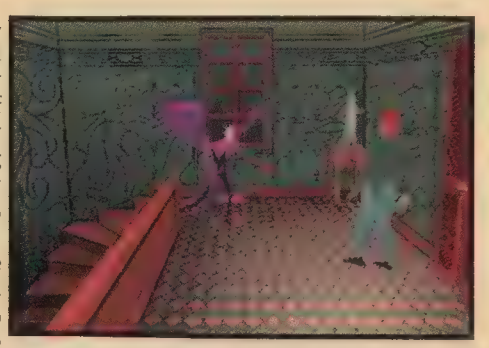


The Legacy

Released at almost the same time was **Event Horizon**'s *Veil of Darkness*, an entertaining adventure game which served up ghosts, werewolves, hoards of vampires, and every other monster in the horror canon. A kind of *Lost Horizon* with vampires, the story centers around a hidden valley under the thrall of an evil vampire named Kairn.

Microprose UK's entry in the horror wars was the impressive role-playing adventure *The Legacy*. While it is yet another cursed-house game, there's also interdimensional travel and a cornucopia of nasty creatures. The graphics in *The Legacy* are the real standout, and feature a nightmarish asylum straight out of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*. With both hit points and the lurking threat that you'll be driven insane by what you see, *The Legacy* provides a gaming experience much like Chaosum's classic paper-game *Call of Cthulhu*. It's all marred, however, by your character's tendency to die every few minutes at the hands of much more powerful beings.

These games offered a glimpse at the evolution of interactive horror. They showed potential, but still clung to many conventions of their fantasy role-playing cousins. Only the trappings were different. The genre hadn't matured, and had yet to explore the adult themes and taboos that distinguish the best horror.

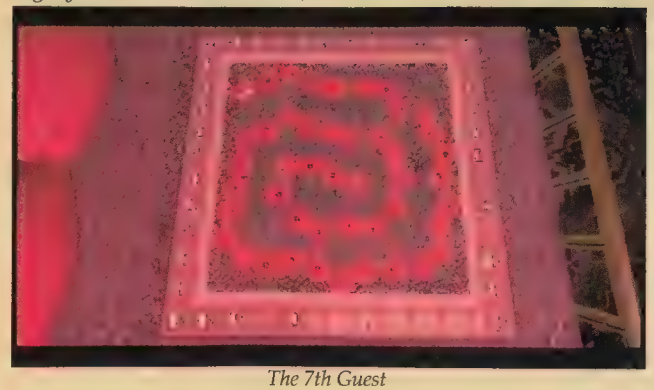


Alone in the Dark

Beginning with *The 7th Guest*, that would all change.

The 7th Quest

"Ghost, n, The outward and visible sign of an inward fear." — Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*



The 7th Guest

That the largest computer game in the history of the medium is classic gothic horror wasn't intentional, says co-creator Rob Landeros of Trilobyte. But as the design team pressed the graphic boundaries that had defined computer gaming, *The 7th Guest* soon grew to be a two-CD monster. Realistic, high-resolution video depicting the story of evil toymaker Henry Stauf and his haunted house is woven throughout the game, triggered by solving various puzzles. As you travel deeper into the house, solving more puzzles, a story of cosmic evil and Faustian deals begins to emerge. The thick atmosphere of the game, combined with some scenes of shocking violence (such as the notorious scene in which a baby is suffocated), makes *The 7th Guest* one of the most successful horror games of them all.

The Trilobyte team is currently busy working on *The Eleventh Hour*, the sequel to *The 7th Guest*. Check out our preview elsewhere in this issue.

"Shoot 'em in the brain." — *Night of the Living Dead*

The character is made of polygons, with a boxy head and odd, angled limbs. He's dressed rather nattily, and

Alone in the Dark

Alone in the Dark

doesn't really look like someone who could do a lot of harm. The attic he stands in is effectively rendered but sparse. But as the figure crosses the attic to search a chest, we see just *why* he's made of polygons: movement is rarely this fluid and natural on computers.

Suddenly, the window darkens, and a vicious, snarling beast crashes into the attic and immediately sets upon our hero. With a few good kicks and a couple right hooks, the beast explodes in a shower of ectoplasmic goo.

The game is *Alone in the Dark* from French publisher **I-Motion**, and it was one of the surprise hits of the year. Loosely based on the writing of H.P. Lovecraft, the story centers around either a male or female character investigating a haunted house where evil lurks. As either Edward Carnby or Emily Hartwood, you enter the creepy Derceto house to attempt to unravel the mystery of Jeremy Hartwood's suicide and the evil that drove him to it. In the course of navigating the house and the winding labyrinths and tunnels beneath, you'll have to use a combination of wits, muscle, and firepower to defeat numerous monsters. As befits a Lovecraftian game, there are numerous ancient tomes to fill in the story, and reading one of them drives the hero temporarily insane! Only the most jaded gamer could fail to be delighted with *Alone*, which captures all the action and menace of a good horror tale.

I-Motion is also planning to bring *Alone in the Dark* to CD-ROM, with CD music and all the text narrated. As a bonus, the CD will include another game called *Jack in the Dark*, featuring the same engine as *Alone*. In *Jack*, a pretty girl is trapped in a department store and must find her way out. And we haven't seen the last of our hero: I-Motion is currently working on *Alone in the Dark II*. This all-new adventure features pirates, gangsters, and more horror in a game twice as long and with better graphics. Expect it some time in 1994.

I-Motion's latest, however, is called *Shadow of the Comet*, an adventure game being released on CD-ROM. Based on the popular *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing system from Chaosum, *Shadow* uses the same game engine as **Capstone**'s *Eternam*. Set in 1910, the story involves John Parker's investigations in the mysterious town of Illsmouth, and the odd drawings of astronomer Lord Boleskine, which may hold the key to an ancient mystery. As Parker, you investigate the odd town and try to learn the dark secrets of the return of Cthulhu and the elder gods. I-Motion hopes to have *Shadow* ready by the end of the year, and plans to continue the *Call of Cthulhu* series with more graphic adventures.

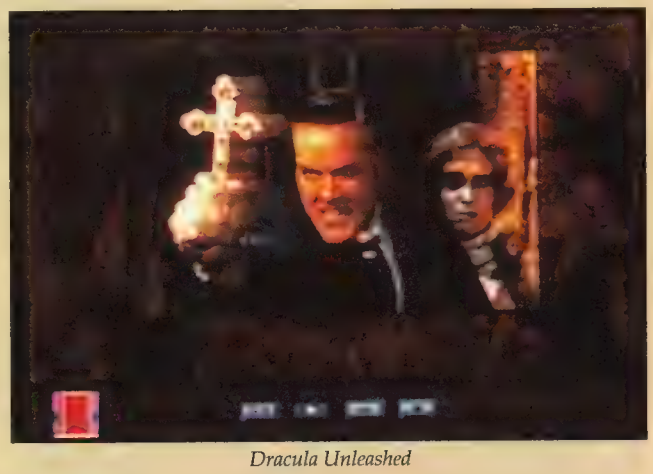
"I don't drink ... wine." — *Dracula* (1931)

They're sexy, they're dead, and they drink blood. Say what you will about vampires, but we just can't seem to get enough of them. From Francis Coppola's new version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to the forthcoming adaptation of Anne Rice's bestselling *Interview with a Vampire*, those undead bloodsuckers just keep coming back — no matter how many times we stake, decapitate, and burn them.

The latest PC incarnation of everyone's favorite Count comes from the team who created the *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* series. Longtime Viacom New Media (formerly ICOM Simulations) producer David Marsh has taken his Sherlock Holmes crew and his considerable experience in gaming and given us *Dracula Unleashed*, a new CD-ROM game featuring extensive video and intriguing structure.

"When producing a horror product," Marsh points out, "you want to get some emotional response: fear, intrigue, suspense. It's very difficult to do that in a graphics-based game. My goal was to makes sure we produced a product that elicits those emotions."

Marsh decided to pick up where Stoker's novel left off. The story begins ten years after the end of the novel, and centers around the character of Alexander Morris — the brother of Quincy Morris, who killed Dracula. Alexander comes to London from Texas to investigate the circumstances of his brother's death. A series of bizarre and horrific incidents in London coincides with Alexander's visit, and as he soon learns the Count is very much "alive."



Dracula Unleashed

The story was written by Tony Sherman, and the script provided by two veteran cre-

Dracula Unleashed

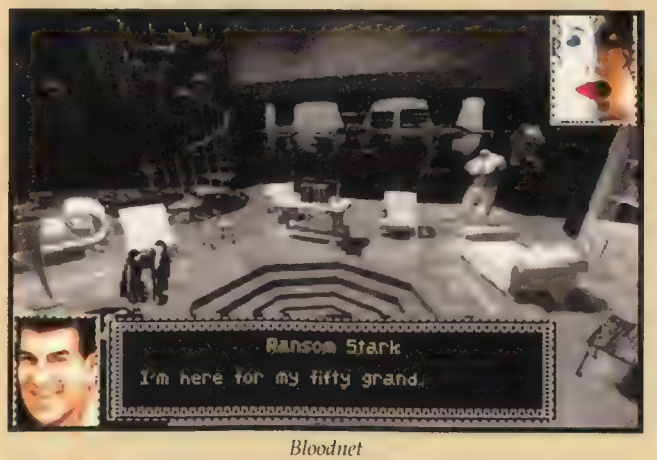
ators of horror games: Andrew Greenberg and William Bridges of White Wolf Productions.

Dracula Unleashed is told entirely with video — over 90 minutes of it. Over a six-week shoot, Marsh filmed 43 actors in over 150 different scenes, with almost two dozen sets ranging from single rooms to full cemeteries, mausoleums, and London streets. There's even a large wolf. Going to different places in the game at different times produces different results, allowing a replayability not seen in the *Holmes* games. If you're not in possession of various objects, then the scene may also play out differently. The interface is simple and easy to use, and the video quality is as good as the average daytime soap. Performances range from good to plain hammy, but on the whole *Dracula Unleashed* is atmospheric and entertaining.

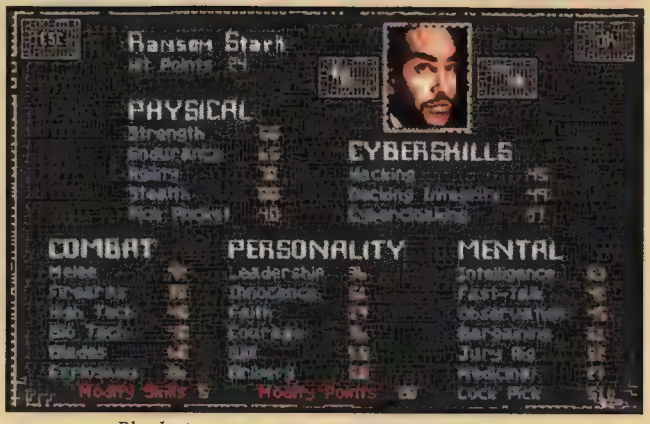
Microprose is taking its own unique approach to vampires in the upcoming *Bloodnet*, billed as a "Cyberpunk Gothic." *Bloodnet* has a strange, hallucinatory quality to it. As Ransom Stark, you are a man changed into a vampire against his will. Stark must search out and destroy the evil vampire lord Abraham Van Helsing in order to restore his humanity. Using "cyberspace," Stark travels a network searching out things to help him in his quest. It's part William Gibson, part Anne Rice, and though these two styles clash at times, they make for an interesting brew.

"Here, sir, there are always more tales." — Stephen King, "The Breathing Method"

Even Sierra, the company that built a reputation on fantasy



Bloodnet



Bloodnet

games, is taking the plunge into horror with a new series: *Gabriel Knight*. Created by Sierra designer Jane Jensen, the series kicks off with *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Father*. Combining mystery, suspense, and gothic horror, *Gabriel Knight* centers on the titular struggling horror novelist who becomes involved in various occult investigations. The series is introduced by a novella set in Charleston in 1693, and involving Knight's ancestor, a witch-hunter. This witch-hunter falls in love with a woman who ultimately turns out to be the witch he is seeking. And in trying to save her, he loses his family's magic talisman and bring disgrace upon his descendants.

The game begins with Knight researching a series of voodoo-related serial murders for a new book he's writing. Haunted by dreams of his witch-hunter ancestors, he eventually becomes involved in a quest to find the family talisman. Along the way he meets a descendent of the witch who betrayed his ancestor, and they begin to reenact the battle fought over three hundred years before.

Jensen describes Knight as "a Van Helsing character. In the first game he fights voodoo, in the next lycanthropes, then and vampires. There's a gothic, romantic, very sensual, feeling to series." Sierra still has Roberta Williams's *Scary Tales* in the works.

The rush of horror games shows no signs of abating, and we can count on blood-drenched monitors for some time to come. Horror is more than just monsters, blood, and chainsaws. It is a journey on the dark side of the imagination, an exploration of the evil in all human beings.

To quote the beleaguered Professor Van Helsing in *Dracula*: "It is a terrible task that we undertake, and there may be consequences to make the brave shudder..."

T. Liam McDonald is a contributing editor to the horror magazine *Cemetery Dance*.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

You'd better be — there's a new crop of hard-hitting, bone-crushing football simulations on the market, and here's a look at the first ones to hit the field.

LEE BUCHANAN

Football fans had reason to rejoice this past September. Just as the 1993-94 NFL season got underway, three new PC gridiron simulations arrived on store shelves — *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* from **Dynamix**, **MicroProse**'s *NFL Coaches Corner Football*, and *Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe* from **Merit**—and each has something unique to offer PC sports gamers.

New versions of two other notable football simulations - *Joe Montana* from **Spectrum Holobyte** and **Accolade**'s *Unnecessary Roughness* (the upgrade to *Mike Ditka Ultimate Football* -- weren't released in time to be included in this article, but you can expect complete coverage on those titles in an upcoming issue.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO

When *Front Page Sports: Football* was released late last year, it instantly became the most complete football simulation on the market, if not the best sports game in any category. Dynamix's new version, *Football Pro*, fixes some annoying bugs and adds a few needed features to make an already amazing game the undisputed champ of computer sports simulations.

Front Page Sports: Football Pro

This isn't just a simulation of the *game* of football; *Football Pro* lets you experience every aspect of pro football, from the wheeling and dealing in the front office to the rousing action between the goal lines. Players age, their skills diminish, and their careers are ended by injury. But at the end of a season, there's a crop of college players eager to bring new blood into the league. Trades, free agents, drafts, injuries, and thrilling graphics - *Football Pro* has it all. It's hard to imagine a more complete football simulation.

Of the several significant enhancements over the previous version, the most welcome addition to *Football Pro* is the use of real NFL player names and stats from the 1992 season. Now you get current 1993

rosters and this year's schedule, challenging you to improve the lot of your favorite team — or spoil the fortune of a longtime rival.

The on-field graphics, outstanding in the original product, are even better now, with flips added to the assortment of jarring tackles. And unlike most other games, the players aren't motionless before the snap — linebackers bob back and forth, faking a blitz, and quarterbacks and defensive captains turn their heads from side to side as they call plays and audibles.

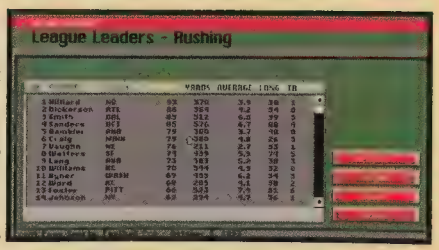
The colors of the field and the players are vibrant and

Front Page Sports: Football Pro

accurate. The graphics are simply gorgeous -- easily the best of any football simulation — and the animation brings it all to stunning life. And you can view the great on-field action from several perspectives, including a much-improved overhead view.

The addition of NFLPA names and stats may be the most obvious improvement to *Football Pro*, but the most important enhancement is at first invisible: a much better computer opponent. The original version was thrilling to watch, but when your opponent, down by 14 points, kicked a field goal with two minutes left to play, you angrily forgot about the lovely graphics.

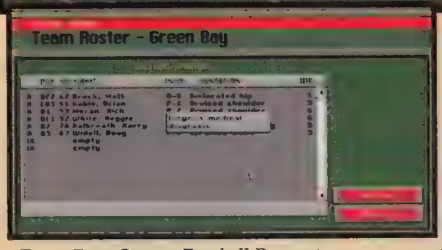
Thankfully, *Football Pro* corrects that glaring problem by providing a computer coach that's nearly as savvy as you'll want to face. There's very little illogical play-calling, and the computer is much



Front Page Sports: Football Pro

more conscious of the clock, going to a quick huddle when time is precious. The artificial intelligence of the computer coach in *Football Pro* is now clearly the most sophisticated available in a graphical football simulation.

Computer-controlled teams use playbooks suited to the skills of their players, and



Front Page Sports: Football Pro

they have the ability to change game plans based upon new personnel, injuries, and past performance. When you face Warren Moon and the Houston Oilers, for instance, be prepared to stop a high-octane, run-and-shoot offense. Against the Cowboys, you're going to have to stop Emmitt Smith first before you need to worry about the passing game.

The sound effects of the original game have also been upgraded. Colliding players now make realistic noises, instead of the annoying belching sounds of the previous version. The roar of the crowd rises and falls with the fortunes of the home team. As play nears the goal line, crowd noise rises to a crescendo that really adds to the realism of the moment. And the home crowd is still hard to please, booing every time the visiting team scores.

Most other features remain intact in the new version, including a powerful editor for plays, playbooks, teams, and rosters. Coaching tendencies are rated — and can be edited — for hundreds of game situations.

Every aspect of the game is crafted with remarkable detail and precision. You aren't merely informed that Green Bay linebacker Brian Noble is injured; you're told that Noble has suffered a strained knee ligament and is doubtful for three weeks. Substitutions are handled automatically as players tire or get hurt, though you can bring in subs manually, too.

No other sports simulation matches *Football Pro* in either depth of play or attention to detail. And if worrying about roster moves, trades, draft picks, and training camp might sound overwhelming, you can let the computer take over some team functions if you don't want to concern yourself with every aspect of the franchise.

Football Pro's stats package simply couldn't be any better. Virtually every meaningful team and individual statistic is tracked, during each season and over the course of a player's career. One drawback to *Football Pro*'s massive statistical database, however, is the agonizing amount of time it takes to sort individual stats. It takes so long to sort, say, league leaders in rushing, that I'm sometimes reluctant to do it. For the numbers-conscious fan, though, that's a small price to pay for such comprehensive reports.

With *Football Pro*, Dynamix has taken computer sports gaming to a new level, crafting a detailed, exciting simulation that rises head and shoulders above some very worthy competition. *Football Pro* isn't just the best football sim around; this game has drastically changed the playing field.

NFL COACHES CORNER FOOTBALL

Microprose's first entry on the gridiron is *NFL Coaches Club Football*, and it's a spectacular effort. Here, too, you'll find real players with skills based on 1992 stats, as well as a current schedule and 1993 rosters that reflect off-season trades.

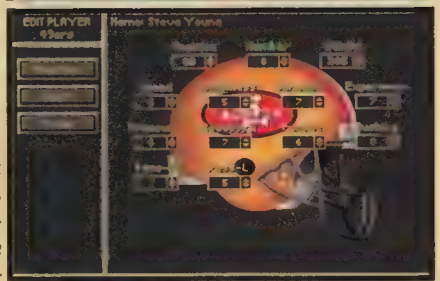
Play-calling is at the same time a strength and a weakness of *Coaches Club Football*. To call a play, you have to flip through a playbook containing 80 offensive or defensive plays. The menu shows only one play at time, and there's no way to find a specific play without lots of scrolling. Unless you know your playbook by heart — which you should as head coach — it can be maddening to find that sweep you want to run as the clock ticks down. There is an option to modify the playbook, putting plays in whatever order you wish. But with 80 plays, finding one can still be a challenge, and you can't print the playbook.

On the plus side, *Coaches Club* has a feature that works like an offensive and defensive coordinator, suggesting plays suited to the situation. On third-and-goal from the one-yard line, for instance, the play-calling screen might appear with a fullback dive play. You can change the play, of course, but the suggestion is usually sound. Following the computer's recommendations will result in a strategically solid, but predictable, game plan.

That feature, which is not mentioned in the manual, will help rookies get into the game and ease the burden of being head coach. You can follow the computer's advice most of the time, changing the plays a bit to keep the other team guessing.

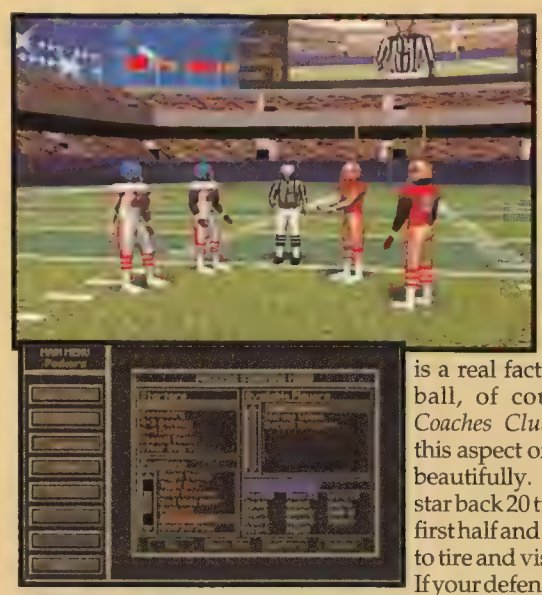
Coaches Club's on-field graphics are a mixed bag. The field and teams are rather bland, with the muted colors detracting from the overall visual impression, and the players are almost tiny. The animation of the players, on the other hand, is very realistic. There are eight standard perspectives, including views from behind the offense or defense, a quarterback perspective, a view from either sideline or the press box, and an overhead angle. That's more perspectives than you'll find in most other games, but *Coaches Club* allows you to further adjust the perspective by rotating, tilting, and zooming the camera, offering an unlimited choice of viewing angles.

Switching to one of the standard perspectives only takes a keystroke, and you can also save two customized views to be accessed just as simply. All these viewing angles are also available in the instant replay mode. If you're a fan who appreciates the multitude of angles afforded by TV coverage, you'll love the flexibility of *Coaches Club*.



NFL Coaches Corner Football

Sound effects are outstanding, with the quarterback's count, the collisions on the line, and the grunts of tackling players all accurately reproduced.



NFL Coaches Corner Football

The team editor in *Coaches Club Football* is perhaps the strongest of the three games we compared. Teams are assigned ratings, from 1 to 99, for tendencies in penalties, kickoff and punt returns, kickoff and punting defense, and punt and field-goal blocking. And those are just the overall team ratings; individual players have up to 13 attributes that can be adjusted.

Each coach, with his real name, is rated in several strategic areas, such as using zone or man-to-man coverage, or calling long passes rather than safer, shorter passes. Most importantly, each team has a unique playbook that reflects the skills of its players and the strategic tendencies of its coach. As a result, each opponent presents a new set of challenges, and you actually feel like you're coaching against Jimmy Johnson or Don Shula. The level of detail in this area is unsurpassed.

The play editor is another powerful feature, allowing you to modify existing plays or create your own. On offense, you choose formations, blocking assignments, and pass routes. On defense, you can assign a task to each individual defender. After you've created a play, you can go to the practice field to perfect it. The formations and plays available are too numerous to mention. Let's just say that *Coaches Club* allows you to run about any play that's possible in a football game.

Fatigue is a real factor in football, of course, and *Coaches Club* handles this aspect of the game beautifully. Run your star back 20 times in the first half and he'll begin to tire and visibly slow. If your defensive squad is on the field for most of a quarter, players will wear down and require rest. Luckily, setting starting lineups and substituting players couldn't be much simpler. To choose starting lineups or call in players from the bench, click on the time-out button on the play-calling menu. From there, just click on a starter and see a list of possible replacements.

An excellent feature unique to *Coaches Club* is the on-screen labeling of players' names during play. You can call up the names of either the offensive or defensive players, so you can see who's doing what. Some players might find it distracting, but you can always toggle it off, and the color of the text also alerts you to fatigue levels of your players — green indicates fresh players, yellow shows that they're beginning to tire, and red means a player is exhausted. Get players off the field when they're tired: They move like molasses and miss easy tackles.

NFL Coaches Corner Football

At halftime of each game, an attractive menu shows your team and coaching staff in the locker room, where you can watch highlights of the first half, check statistics, get advice from your team's real-life head coach or change the gameplan.

The statistics package is a solid part of *Coaches Club Football*, though it's not as comprehensive as that offered in *Football Pro*. Individual and team stats are tracked in most of the major categories, and league leaders are compiled in passing, rushing, receiving, kick returns, punt returns, tackles, sacks, and interceptions. Unlike *Football Pro*, however, you can't sort stats to see, for example, not only who leads the league in rushing, but also who leads in rushing touchdowns or number of carries.

Despite the detailed player and team ratings and excellent coaching profiles, the computer coach is by no means perfect. He'll work the clock beautifully in a two-minute drill, hurrying to the line, throwing sideline routes, and calling time-outs when appropriate. Even so, the play-calling is sometimes ridiculous. Down by three touchdowns with less than two minutes to go and facing fourth down, my opponent faked a punt and tried to throw for a first down. Boy, was I fooled! That sort of bone-headed play-calling is common in football sims, and such lapses in logic seriously mar an otherwise excellent game. Few games get it right the first time around; the computer coach in the first version of *Front Page Sports: Football* had the same stupid tendencies. Here's hoping MicroProse fixes this problem in the next version.

I found a couple of other troubling bugs in *Coaches Club Football*. When players reach the sideline on the bottom of the screen, part of the field turns blue. More significantly, the clock continues to run after some incomplete passes.

There's one curious omission that works against the game's claim to be a realistic simulation of pro football: There are no injuries. A couple of key injuries can wreck a season for even the best team. It's too important an aspect of football to leave out of an otherwise detailed simulation.

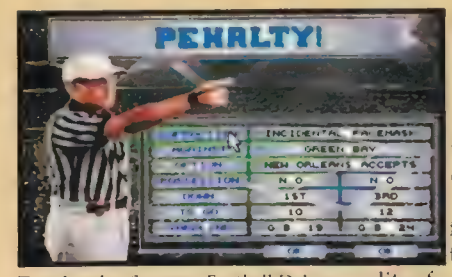
NFL Coaches Corner Football

Those are some serious shortcomings, but they can and should be corrected in future versions. When they are, *NFL Coaches Club Football* just might be a contender for the Super Bowl.

TOM LANDRY STRATEGY FOOTBALL DELUXE

Merit Software's *Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe* is an enhanced version of an already successful football simulation. There are some significant new features here, including the ability to edit leagues, teams, players and schedules; an option for league play; and multi-game injuries. League play includes a standard 16-game schedule with three rounds of playoffs and the championship game. The editor program allows you to customize leagues and schedules.

It's an improved package and a solid football sim, but unfortunately *TLSF Deluxe* is still quite a way behind its prime competition, *Front Page Sports: Football Pro*. A few years ago, *TLSF Deluxe* would have been a Super Bowl con-



Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe

tender, but on today's playing field it has been reduced to an also-ran.

That's not to say that *TLSF Deluxe* doesn't have things going for it, the most notable of which is its ease of play. An extremely logical and intuitive interface means that you can dive in almost immediately, and it seems that nearly every function in the game — including setting up leagues, calling plays, and checking stats — can be accomplished quickly and smoothly with a few mouse clicks.

While *TLSF Deluxe* doesn't have all the bells and whistles of its competition, other football sims should take notice of the way this game handles play-calling. Instead of having to hurriedly scroll through a playbook, the play-calling menu in *TLSF Deluxe* guides you painlessly through the process (though there are on delay of game penalties).

There are 12 offensive formations available, and you can select the strong side of each one. Running plays are grouped as middle runs, inside runs, and outside runs. Passing plays fall into five areas — short, medium, long, trick plays, and finesse plays like the screen pass. There are several pass plays to each receiver within those categories.

Defensive play-calling is just as easy. You choose from seven basic formations, set the defensive focus to run or pass, and select the secondary coverage. In addition, you can double-team a receiver, and key on a running back. A welcome addition to the Deluxe version is the ability to order individual linebackers and the free safety to blitz. An excellent online help feature that defines football terms and suggests plays and formations against various offenses and defenses.

That friendly interface carries over to the powerful new editor function, which allows you to customize leagues, teams, and players. Here you can set up your own professional league or create a college conference with the college game's own set of rules, including two-point conversions and no overtime.

The team editor allows you to choose from among three styles for each team's computer coach, and adjust offensive and defensive play-calling tendencies in just about any game situation. *TLSF*'s editing capabilities are a wonderful addition and may be the best available in a football sim.

Penalties are another strong point of *TLSF Deluxe*. While other football sims, including those reviewed here, offer a limited number of penalties, this game has almost all of them. Most impressive is the depiction of the infraction in the on-field action. When a defensive lineman crosses the line before the snap, you *see* it happen. When your opponent's cornerback hits your receiver too early, you see it happen and scream for the ref to throw a flag.

Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe

And *TLSF Deluxe*, like the original game, offers modem play, a valuable feature unmatched by the competition. It's fun to play against the computer, but nothing can touch the thrill of going head-to-head against a human opponent.

But when you see your team line up for the kickoff, you encounter *Landry*'s most glaring shortcoming — the on-field graphics. The playing field and stadium are actually quite well done, with a colorful crowd and the sideline crowded with coaching staff and cheerleaders. But once play begins, the graphics quickly lose their appeal. The players' movements never change, and all tackles look the same. Most disappointing is the inability to change the viewing perspective. While the other games reviewed here allow you to watch the action from many angles, in *TLSF Deluxe* you're locked into a television-type sideline view.

This weakness carries over to the game's instant replay feature. Like the live-action perspective, instant replay is limited to one angle, and slow-motion is not an option.

Sound effects are adequate in *Landry*, although there's no signal-calling by the quarterback. There is an announcer who calls the down, time outs, and penalties, but his voice is flat and uninspired.

Another obvious shortcoming is the use of fictional names for players. While the other two games we reviewed forked over the bucks to the NFL Players Association in order to use the real names, this game uses real stats and attributes but fictional names. So instead of Brett Favre leading the Packers, you get LeFavre. The editor allows you to type in the real names of players, but just replacing *one* roster is a daunting task. Face it, Merit, computer sports gamers want the real thing without having to type in names for two weeks.

TLSF Deluxe tracks statistics and league leaders, but only in the main offensive categories — passing, rushing, and receiving. Defensive stats, including tackles, sacks and interceptions, are ignored completely, an omission that's sure to disappoint true football fans.

TLSF Deluxe has several strengths, notably its ease of play and a powerful team editor. If it weren't for its two obvious weaknesses — boring, inflexible graphics and fictional players — the game would be a serious contender in this hotly contested category. In its current form, however, *TLSF Deluxe* falls short of the competition.

Tom Landry Strategy Football Deluxe

One gripe about all three games: There are no black players represented on the field at all. If you're going to include real players with real attributes, it's a simple matter to show their skin color. An all-white pro league isn't fair *or* appealing, and it certainly isn't realistic.

A DYNASTY IS BORN

The verdict: *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* dominates its competition. *NFL Coaches Corner* is unquestionably a first-rate game, one that would easily get the nod if it weren't for *Football Pro*. And *TLSF Deluxe* offers an entertaining, engrossing simulation of professional football. But they can't compare to *Football Pro*. Like other football dynasties — the Green Bay Packers, Pittsburgh Steelers, and San Francisco 49ers — *Football Pro* rules as the unchallenged king of football.

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The pace never falters in *Shadowcaster*, the unique new point-of-view action adventure from ORIGIN. You race through corridors lined with pulsing lights, and into chambers covered with sculpted faces in this smooth-scrolling, fun-filled odyssey.

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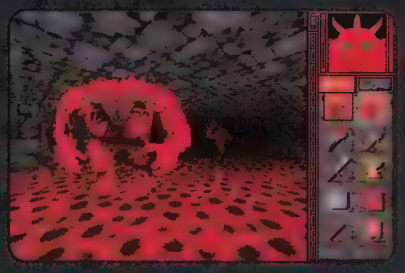

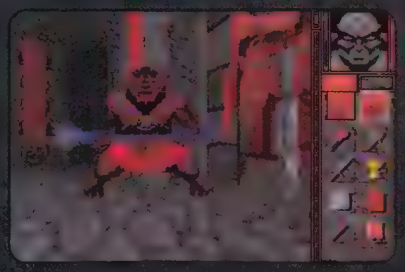

Actual screens may vary.

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Product Information Number 102

THE VESA SOUND STANDARD

There's some incredible audio hardware out there, but no standard that allows programmers to take advantage of it. That might be changing....

Tim Victor

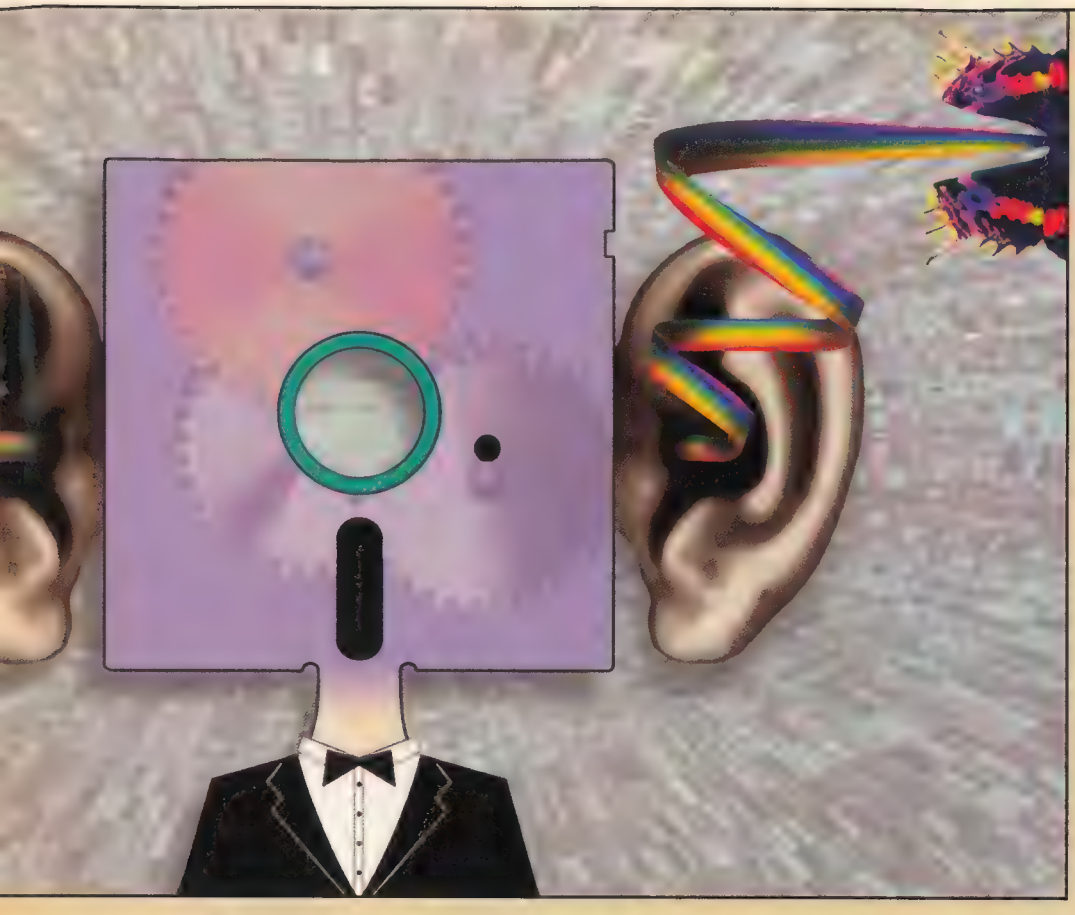
Looking to establish a new standard for software support, PC sound card makers have turned to a surprising sponsor: VESA, the Video Electronics Standards Association. With the forthcoming VESA BIOS Extension for Audio Interfaces (VBE/AI), they hope to create a common driver standard for sound cards under DOS, and it's aimed squarely at the PC games market.

Nearly every sound card on the market offers some degree of Sound Blaster emulation, the current de facto standard for DOS compatibility. But a flashy new sound card emulating a Sound Blaster sounds just like a frumpy old Sound Blaster, with buzzy 2-operator FM synthesis, low-fi 8-bit samples for speech and sound effects, and no stereo.

Developers are rushing to support premium sound cards, but new products appear in the market faster than many of them can handle. Each "Plus," "Pro," or "Deluxe" added to a sound card's name represents additional potential, features that developers must support to get the highest quality sound from that board. Interplay Productions' Kevin Horn explains the publishers' predicament: "We have to decide which cards are important and which aren't. You can't support every last card; there's only so much room on a disk for drivers."

SHIFTING THE BURDEN

The VBE/AI initiative is an effort to shift some of that support burden from game publishers to hardware manufacturers, a move begun by the manufacturers themselves. One of the standard's first advocates was Media Vision's Product Manager Rick Allen. He recalls, "I really wanted this standard a year before we even started working on it, when I was trying to get native-mode support for our products. Now our Sound Blaster compatibility is very good, so that isn't as big an issue, but we have things com-



ing in the future and we'd like to see them supported, so it's still very important to us."

Sierra Semiconductor, maker of the Aria audio chipset, also plans to support VBE/AI. "Hardware improves rapidly, but software changes very slowly," notes Sierra's Steve Fisher. "We'll come out with some great new technology, then we have to spend a lot of time lobbying developers to support that technology in their products. If they write something that requires new hardware, they can only sell it to people who have that new hardware, so publishers tend to write to the lowest common denominator."

In place of a hardware standard — the Sound Blaster — VESA's audio committee offers an industry-wide software standard. If this specification for sound card device drivers catches on, every card will come with a VESA driver written by the manufacturer, a single file on a floppy disk. With a software standard, all the program code to actually operate the sound card is isolated in the device driver, making it easy for any VESA-aware game to utilize a card's full potential. Applications access the driver through a standard set of subroutine calls, to get information about an adapter's features and capabilities, as well as control the board's operation without having to know the elaborate hardware details.

"The sound card industry was founded on a few hardware standards, and the industry is stuck there," says Doug Cody, Senior Software Engineer at Media Vision and one of the chief architects of the proposed standard. The VBE/AI standard could "change the shape of the market. Instead of qualifying products by what they're compatible with, they'll be qualified by what features they support. It lets vendors take back control of their products. They can write one piece of software that lets their hardware work with any game."

OLD WAYS DIE HARD

Game publishers are quite eager to support better sound, but some are reluctant to give up direct access to the cards' hardware. They're concerned that a driver might compromise the sound quality of their programs. Media Vision's Allen acknowledges, "That's one of the big areas of concern. They want to be able to program the cards with their own custom sounds, and we've had to make sure that they'll still be able to do that. I don't think they'll be giving up as much as they think."

He points out that the VBE/AI uses a very simple low-level driver. Game developers all use sound libraries, sophisticated collections of program code for playing music and sound effects, and a VESA driver won't change the way developers work with their libraries. Many publishers license commercial libraries for use in their games, and the VESA committee has solicited input from developers John Miles (the Audio Interface Library) and John Ratcliff (DigiPak and MidPak libraries) to make sure the VBE/AI driver interface won't constrain these popular sound libraries.

Nevertheless, developers can still go straight to the hardware of a card if they need that last extra bit of control. At least they'll have VESA-compatibility to fall back on for generic support of any other board, which represents a higher common denominator, a more capable and better-sounding alternative than the current catch-all, Sound Blaster compatibility. At press time, the standard is awaiting final approval, with a public announcement planned for the Fall Comdex trade show in mid-November.

SOUND CARDS: THE CLASS OF 1993

It was a good year for PC sound adapters. 1993 brought a bounty of moderately priced, high-quality sound cards, with premium features like CD-quality 16-bit sampling and wavetable synthesis available at popular prices. 3D audio and voice recognition, capabilities once found only in esoteric, special-purpose equipment, moved into the mainstream of PC audio as new, lower-cost DSP (digital signal processor) chips

Sound Blaster 16 by Creative Labs

brought more bang for the buck across the entire range of products.

Contenders in the 16-bit sweepstakes include **Media Vision's Pro Audio Studio 16** and **Creative Labs' Sound Blaster 16** with Advanced Signal Processing. Both allow recording and playback of true CD-quality digital audio, but use traditional FM (frequency modulation) hardware for synthesizing musical instrument sounds. These cards also include text-to-speech and voice-recognition programs, and compression/decompression software to reduce the size of high-fidelity sampled audio files.

Pro Audio Studio 16XL by Media Vision

Sigma Designs' WinSound 16 and the **Logitech SoundMan 16** represent variations on the same theme. Both are based on audio chips produced by Media Vision, also used in the Pro Audio Studio 16. The basic functional specs are the same, but each is packaged with a different selection of software and there are also important differences in some of the hardware details. The WinSound 16 actually includes two CD-ROM interfaces, one a SCSI port, the other for use with certain Sony drives, while Logitech keeps the price of the SoundMan 16 down by leaving out the CD-ROM controller entirely. It does include a CD-ROM audio input connector and audio mixer circuitry, keeping it compatible with CD-ROM drives that have their own controller cards.

FM synthesis has served the world well in the Ad Lib/Sound Blaster family of cards, but the best-sounding boards now use *wavetable synthesis*. Instead of mathematically computing the waveforms of musical instrument sounds *a la* FM synthesis, wavetable systems take advantage of low-priced ROM (Read-Only Memory) chips to store digital recordings of each instrument. Creative Labs' Wave Blaster option adds wavetable capabilities to the Sound Blaster 16, while Media Vision offers the Pro Audio Studio 16 XL card with wavetable technology from synthesizer-maker Korg. A wavetable upgrade might also be available soon for existing Pro Audio Spectrum and Pro Audio Studio cards.

The **Advanced Gravis UltraSound** card offers inexpensive wavetable synthesis, with an innovative design that blurs the line between sample playing and music synthesis and a street price that's under $150. Each of its 32 digital audio channels can play sampled sounds, wavetable musical instrument voices, or sampled sounds as musical instruments. It's the only card in its class that allows users to create their own wavetable instrument sounds, attracting a lot of interest from musicians and hobbyists. The UltraSound does have its limits though: incomplete Sound Blaster emulation hinders compatibility, and although it's a 16-bit sample player, it requires an optional 16-bit daughterboard to move beyond 8-bit sample recording. Advanced Gravis also offers the higher-priced UltraSound MAX card, which includes 16-bit sampling, Focal Point 3D audio software, and a SCSI CD-ROM interface.

Wavetable cards based on the Sierra Semiconductor's Aria chipset include the **Genoa AudioBahn 16 Pro**, **Computer Peripherals' ViVa Maestro 16**, **AVM Technology's Alta Pro Synthesizer**, and the **Diamond SonicSound**. The Genoa and AVM cards include Aria Listener voice-recognition software, an extra-cost option for the other two. Like the basic Gravis UltraSound, the Aria chipset allows CD-quality digital audio playback but falls short when sampling, supporting only 10 bits of resolution. An upgraded chipset will soon address that shortcoming, but Diamond Computer Systems has already taken matters into their own hands:

Digital Sound Pro 16 by Advanced Gravis

extra circuitry on the SonicSound enables true 16-bit sampling and also improves the board's overall frequency response.

The basic version of **Cardinal Technologies' Digital Sound Pro 16** only offers Sound Blaster-compatible music synthesis, but adding wavetable synthesis is as easy as dropping in a ROM chip, thanks to the programmable DSP chip at its heart. It also boasts full 16-bit stereo sampling, a better-than-CD 48 kHz sampling rate, and a Sony-compatible CD-ROM interface. In **Digital Sound Pro 16 Plus** guise, it includes a 16-bit SCSI interface as well.

LISTEN UP!

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